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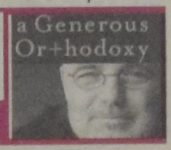

60th year of publication

Deus caritas est!

Harry der Nederlanden

Deus caritas est. God is love. I'm sure those words have never appeared in the headlines of any secular paper. Yet, it is news. It is the good news that is new again every day. And it is worth repeating anew each day. But it is hard to make it new in our jaded, image-overloaded society.

Yet, listen closely to the music booming from the radios and ipods. Watch the television dramas and the latest films. Scan the shelves of the bookstores. A huge percentage of them sing the praises of love or trace the convoluted course of love.

So it shouldn't have been all that surprising to have the newest Pope, Benedict XVI, devote the first encyclical of his career to the theme of love: *Deus caritas est*.

A great many journalists did, however, express surprise. Some pleasant surprise. Some indignant surprise. Before becoming pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had the task of defending Catholic doctrine. His latest writings took on the relativism of post-modern society to assert the truths of the faith and he tirelessly warned Europeans that they were losing the very foundations of their culture and civilization. Nowadays in the minds of most, the defense of doctrine and of truth is incompatible with love. So some were pleasantly surprised and some indignant that the Vatican Enforcer should dare to speak of love.

This is precisely why Benedict chose to begin by attempting to hold once again before us a vision of a love that is at the same time the Light and the Truth. The entire encyclical may be read as an elaboration of the Bible verse with which it begins: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (I John 4:16).

But on the occasions when he spoke about his encyclical, the Pope just as often alluded to Dante's great poem *The Divine Comedy* and to the Greeks. This is not a careful biblical study of Scripture passages, though it does, of course, often allude to Scripture. It is rather an attempt to get believers to see that love does indeed abide with us in very concrete form: that it involves the community of the Church and its work in the world. But it is also a witness to a world in which religion is often associated with conflict and violence that the core message is love – love of God and love of neighbor.

Eros and agape

The first thing the encyclical tackles is the misunderstanding of love as *eros*, a force of life celebrated in the ancient fertility cults and for the ancient Greeks a kind of intoxication that overcomes all, even reason. The new Testament avoided the word *eros* and spoke instead of *agape*.

As a consequence, Christianity has been accused of destroying *eros* or sexual passion, quashing it beneath prohibitions and denigrating the human body. But, counters the Pope, it was *eros* that threatened to overwhelm the finite human person by absorbing him into a cosmic force.

While *eros* is an attempt to lose oneself in an impersonal force, the *Song of Songs*, he reminds us, gives us a love "which involves a real discovery of the other...." It is no longer animated by the quest for self-intoxication; here it seeks the good of the beloved. It even renounces the self for the sake of the beloved.

It becomes *agape* love, seeking the eternal. *Agape* moves us out of a closed, inward-looking attitude, and through self-giving it sets us on a journey of discovery of the other, of God and of our own authentic selves.

Agape does not do away with *eros*, however, says Benedict, for as "ascending love" it also affirms "descending love." The two movements are united in one single love. The encyclical envisions a sort of evolution of love from a covetous, self-seeking love into a love that increasingly seeks the happiness of the other.

The way Benedict explains his vision, it seems to me, could cause confusion. At times it seems to confuse the pagan, and therefore unbiblical, view of love with love on the human, bodily plane. The encyclical seems to say that somehow love for God takes pagan love in tow, lifts it to a higher level and thereby transforms it.

But mutual love among human beings, including erotic love, is not something that needs to be elevated or sublimated into something else to be good. It is not, as I understand it, imperfect for being merely human. It becomes imperfect by becoming sinful.

In fact, it sometimes goes wrong when we invest more into it than it can bear. This is what plagues many of our love songs and love stories: they embrace the illusion that erotic love can become the source and center of life's meaning. It is this illusion – an idolatrous one – that destroys many a marriage and launches many an affair.

The encyclical is on more biblical ground, it seems to me, when it stresses that love "is a single reality, but with different dimensions." Christian love (*agape*) doesn't somehow contain a pagan moment (*eros*) within itself, but it redirects the human heart and human love from the ground up and from the inside out.

The Pope wants to stress that Christian love is not an ethereal second story "opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man." Well and good. But it does not accept and uplift pagan *eros*; it simply restores human love to its proper orbit and direction.

See **Deus caritas est** *on page 3...*

News

The persecution of Palestinian Christians

Elizabeth Kendal

Prof. Justus Reid Weiner has provided a detailed and scholarly description of the suffering of Palestinian Christians in a monograph entitled "Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society." (http://www.jcpa.org/christian-persecution.htm)

Professor Weiner begins with a brief look at the wider issue of "Christians living in a Muslim world." He notes, "Despite the liberal and secular trends that gained strength from the middle of the nineteenth century..., the recent resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism entails a reversion to historical, cultural, and religious traditions that do not reflect modern social standards."

Prof. Weiner then narrows his focus to examine the plight of Christians under Palestinian Authority (PA) rule. He notes that the Palestinian Authority's Draft Constitution declares that "...in the State of Palestine ... the religion of Islam will be the official religion" and "the Sharia will be the primary source of legislation."

As Weiner explains, the PA's promotion of Sharia (Islamic Law) immediately placed Christians in a precarious position, as Sharia does not afford them equality before the law. Escalating hardship and lawlessness, combined with the inequity of Sharia, makes Palestinian Christians exceedingly vulnerable, and their life increasingly unbearable. According to Prof. Weiner, while the intifada and the economy are significant factors forcing Christians to flee the Palestinian Territories, religious persecution at the hands of increasingly intolerant Muslims is the primary catalyst.

Prof. Weiner's research indicates that the present high rate of Christian emigration out of the Palestinian Territories is not normative, but a response to a phenomenon. He believes that the phenomenon that is driving Palestinian Christians from their homeland is the escalating hostility and persecution they are experiencing due to the dramatic escalation of Islamic extremism in the PA-administered territories. He says this is a direct result of the systematic and pervasive radicalization of Palestinian Muslim society.

School curriculum in PA-run schools is infamous for its glorification of suicide bombers, its radical Islamic fundamentalism, its denial of Israel's right to exist, and its denigration of non-Muslims. As a pre-election Hamas video boasts, "We succeeded, with Allah's grace, to raise an ideological generation that loves death like our enemies love life."

Weiner describes the persecution of Christians as "diverse and widespread", adding that "institutionalized discrimination pervades virtually all realms of life and has become an inexorable part of Palestinian Christian existence."

In summary, Christian communities and individuals suffer the following:

Marginalization

The deliberate and strategic marginalization of Christians in the Palestinian Territories is achieved by means of gerrymanders combined with Muslim immigration that alter the demographics of formerly majority Christian areas. This of course has drastic implications for local elections.

Bethlehem is a classic case. In 1990 Bethlehem was 60 percent Christian. After the PA acquired control of Bethlehem in 1994, Chairman Arafat extended the city's municipal borders to include the 30,000 Muslims living in nearby refugee camps. He also encouraged Muslims in Hebron to immigrate to Bethlehem. After nine Christians members of the Bethlehem City Council were driven to resign their posts in protest of Islamizationist policies, Arafat appointed a Muslim from Hebron as Governor of the Bethlehem District. The entire political structure of Bethlehem was then gradually cleansed of Christians. Christians are leaving. By 2001, Bethlehem was only 20 percent Christian.

Boycotts and extortion

Christians suffer economic hardship as Muslims boycott their businesses. Islamic militants have also forced some Christians to close their businesses. The practice of extortion is so widespread that one Christian businessman told Prof. Weiner, "There isn't a Christian businessman exempt." He said that around 90 percent of Christian businesses in Bethlehem have been forced to close. Those that remain in business are paying protection money to militants.

Christians in business in the Palestinian Territories are also harassed, beaten and robbed by PA police (Weiner cites examples). They are targeted simply because they are Christian. Refusal or inability to pay bribes can lead to torture and even death.

No property rights

Prof. Weiner also explains that, in violation of international human rights norms, Palestinian Land Law prescribes the death penalty to anyone selling land to Jews. According to Weiner, Jerusalem's Arafat-appointed mufti, Sheikh Ekrima Sabri has issued a fatwa to the effect that death will be the penalty to anyone selling land to any non-Muslim. This law extends to Christians, so that they cannot sell land to each other.

Rape of Christian women

According to Weiner's research, violence against Christian women in the Palestinian Territories was rare before the PA took control. Christian women testify that before 1993, security was such that they could walk the streets in safety. However, after the PA took control, Christian women could be attacked with impunity.

Weiner gives several reasons for the sharp rise in sexual violence against Christian women since the PA took control of the Palestinian Territories: the rise in Islamist attitudes (such as Muslim superiority and contempt of infidels); the denigration and relegation of Christians to dhimmi (second class citizen) status with limited rights and no equality before the law; combined with the PA's inaction, regardless of whether that is due to lack of authority or lack of will.

Weiner reports that many Christian girls are being advised to dress as Muslims to avoid problems.

According to Weiner, Christian girls are also being forced into marriages with Muslim men. He retells the story of a wealthy Christian family man who had to resort to force to protect his daughter. A Muslim family came to his home, their son dressed for a wedding and accompanied by a sheikh and 15 Muslim men. They demanded that he hand his daughter over for marriage. After opening fire on the Muslim entourage, the Christian family had to immediately flee the Palestinian Territories.

Pervasive PA incitement

Prof. Weiner's research makes it clear that the negative attitudes held by Palestinian Muslims against their Christian counterparts are supported by the overwhelmingly Muslim PA leadership. Mosques broadcast sermons that drive home the Quranic injunction not to partner with, trust or befriend Jews or Christians, providing Muslims with religious justification for their religious intolerance.

Weiner quotes Joseph Farah, a Lebanese-American Christan editor of the WorldNetDaily online, as saying of Christians under the PA, "They are being driven out. They are being murdered. They are being raped. They are being systematically persecuted. They are being harassed. They are being intimidated." Weiner reports that Palestinian Christians under PA authority are discriminated against "... in the field of education, the receipt of medical benefits, and other government aid." A Lutheran pastor told Weiner, "...if food aid is brought in from Saudi Arabia, Christians are told that they are not entitled to receive any because they are not Muslims."

PA police

According to Prof. Weiner, PA security personnel frequently combine ignorance of the law with Islamist sentiment to become persecutors rather than protectors. Christians are often imprisoned on trumped-up charges of collaborating with Israel. Apostates can expect to be punished mercilessly through torture in PA prisons.

Christian denial

Prof. Weiner's monograph contains material that will help people understand why Palestinian Christians are often quick to deny their suffering. Some Christian leaders deny the sufferings of Christians in order to retain privileges from the PA, such as access to the media, or permission to travel – privileges that are granted in exchange of the dissemination of PA propaganda. Some deny the sufferings of Christians because they are simply blinded by Palestinian nationalist aspirations. But most are simply acting (or rather, not acting) out of fear of violent retribution – they are paralyzed into silence by threat of terror.

Weiner reports that one Christian cleric in Jerusalem compared the behavior of Christian dhimmis to that of battered wives and children. A vulnerable, trapped, battered wife knows she cannot afford to provoke her abuser's wrath. For the victim it is easier, psychologically, to blame oneself (or to gain the approval of the abuser, blame the abuser's "enemy") and it is easier, physically, to avoid confrontation all together.

Justus Reid Weiner is currently a Scholar-in-Residence at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He teaches courses on international law and international business at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, lectures widely abroad, and was a visiting Assistant Professor at Boston University School of Law.

Palestinian Christians: "sacrificial pawns"

Weiner recounts one horrific case of a Palestinian apostate and persistent evangelist named Ahmad El-Achwal, a married father of eight, who struggled for seven years with persecution that included severe torture in PA prisons, as well as frequent severe beatings and death threats from Hamas. Ahmad El-Achwal was murdered on his doorstep by Islamic militants, on January 21, 2004.

Weiner regards Palestinian Christians as the sacrificial pawns of the Middle East peace process. He writes, "The importance of monitoring the PA's record, even during the ongoing violent intifada, cannot be overstated.... The future of the Palestinian Christian community and any other religious minority living under the PA will rest on the potential for religious tolerance...," something Weiner fears is unlikely, at least in the short term.

What now for the Christians of Hamastan?

Hamas' electoral win is not a surprise result that cannot be explained. Hamas will not radicalize Palestinian Muslims. Hamas won the elections because the Palestinian Authority has already radicalized Muslim society to the extent that it freely elected a terrorist organization as its government. Hamas' win is the culmination of decades of growing discontent – with the economy, violence and corruption – coupled with the increased radicalization of

Deus caritas est ... continued from page 1

When Benedict speaks of "love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification" until it "looks to the eternal," I am filled with misgivings. I understand that he wants to teach us that our love for one another needs to be constantly purified of selfishness and domination, but sometimes it sounds as if he's suggesting that our love for one another serves as a springboard toward a higher spirituality. The eternal love of God must inform our love at its beginning, at its source. It is not a magnet that launches our love into supernatural realms.

But perhaps I'm quarreling more about how to put the mystery into words, for the overriding purpose of the encyclical is to keep love's feet on the ground, to stress its embodied nature. Nevertheless, the first section can use more clarity.

Love and justice

When he describes the self-sacrificing nature of love, Benedict suggests that in *agape*, God's love deepens itself by turning "his love against his justice." That again strikes me as an unfortunate turn of phrase. Describing the mystery of God's self-sacrifice in sending his own Son to die, demonstrating thereby the depth of his love in forgiveness, exceeds all our capacities with words. But to play off God's love against his justice, I'm afraid, sets a bad precedent. Doesn't Scripture suggest that it is precisely out of love for us that God upholds justice? We humans do not fare well without justice. I'd hate to think that God's love undermines justice – and I don't believe Benedict wants to suggest that either.

I appreciate his statement: "The history of the love relationship between God and Israel consists, at the deepest level, in the fact that he gives her the Torah, thereby opening Israel's eyes to man's true nature and showing her the path that lead to true humanism." This implies that the Torah – God's word and law, his way of righteousness and justice – is a gift of love, given to help us to flourish and guide us in our care (caritas) for one another.

Church and state

I've quarreled with some of the formulations of the encyclical largely because I think they go against the grain of its central message, which is to affirm the very human and embodied nature of the love that God has shed upon us in Christ Jesus. But this is a very learned German Pope, and he feels obliged to start with the Greeks, and the Greeks are seductive.

The second part of the encyclical works out how God's love embodied in believers mobilizes us as part of a structured, organized community. And "for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."

Benedict points out that the first deacons – the seven appointed by the Apostles – were to be men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Theirs was, thus, not seen as merely a physical task of redistribution but "a truly spiritual office."

The encyclical devotes particular attention to the different functions of the Church and the State. It warns that "the Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State."

The Church does, however, have a task to provide direction to public reason, but in doing so she must appeal to what we all have in common as human beings, i.e. reason and natural law. The Church also seeks to "help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice...."

Even in the most just society, however, love and service to others will be necessary. The Pope warns against the Socialist misconception that just social structures would make works of charity unnecessary: "There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help."

While Christian charity should never be extended in order to win proselytes, "this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God."

There is much else in the brief encyclical that merits mention, including the warning against an activism that seeks to do "what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem."

"Faith tells us," Pope Benedict concludes, "that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that it is really true: God is love! It thus transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands and that, as the dramatic imagery of the end of the Book of Revelation points out, in spite of all darkness he ultimately triumphs in glory."

Palestinian Christians ... *continued*

Palestinian Muslim society.

In a January 31 Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report, George Friedman comments on Fatah's loss of power in the recent Palestinian National Authority (PNA) elections. "It was not simply internal Palestinian politics that drove the Hamas victory. A wave of Islamist politics is sweeping the Muslim and Arab worlds, and the Palestinians are far from immune. The Islamist movement is doing far more than simply challenging the West: It is challenging the secular Arabists who were the heirs of the Nasserite tradition....

"In many ways, Fatah was the embodiment of secular Arabism – the purest form of Nasserism. The Palestinians were among the most secular in the Arab world. Therefore, challenging and defeating Fatah represents a critical moment in the history of the Arab and Muslim world. It represents a new high-water mark for Islamists."

Friedman suggests that Hamas will be primarily concerned with internal, not international politics, as it works to consolidate its position. Hamas will therefore say and do those things that will increase the fervor of their followers and discourage their opponents. They will look to the Islamic world while provoking the West. The West will react to the benefit of Hamas which, as Friedman says, "benefits from a sense of embattlement – the sense that it is confronting the enemies of Islam. As it backs the Israelis and Americans into a corner, and both start reacting, Hamas will increase its strength and authority."

Even before its election victory, Hamas was preparing to further the Islamization of the Palestinian Territories. In December 2005 the leader of the Hamas contingent at the municipal council of Bethlehem, Hassam El-Masalmeh, told *The Wall Street Journal* that Hamas intends to re-institute the "jizya", a tax mandated by the Qur'an to be imposed on non-Muslims who have chosen not to convert to Islam and must now pay for their right to life. (Jizya is a form of systematic religious humiliation, persecution and extortion).

So what now?

For years, the institutionalized discrimination against and persecution of Palestinian Christians has been covered up by Christian leaders who are either afraid of the consequences of upsetting the status quo, or afraid of losing their good standing with the PA; and by Western nations and human rights organizations that are only interested in appeasing and coaxing the Palestinian Authority into peace negotiations. Well the "status quo" (as intolerable as that was) has ended, and peace is not on the table.

Writing prior to the elections, Professor Justus Reid Weiner called on the PA to crack down on Hamas and eliminate its influence and role as an enforcer of Sharia. It is too late for that now that Hamas controls the PA. But as Friedman notes in his Stratfor commentary, "Since peace is always made with enemies, better to deal with your worst enemy than with hapless moderates." This is as good a time as any to commence advocacy on behalf of the persecuted Christians of the Palestinian Territories.

Elizabeth Kendal is principal researcher and writer for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission.

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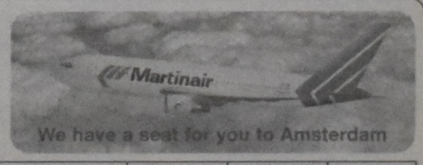

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Editorial

Olympic dreams and Olympic epiphanies

Harry der Nederlanden

Like many other Canadians, during the week of the Olympics I couldn't resist peeking in on the games every so often on televison. Some events will never become huge spectator sports, I'm afraid. Watching contestant after contestant hurtle down an icy channel on a skeleton sled to see whether one of them can whittle a few hundredths of a second off the leader's time is only marginally more entertaining than watching my cat sleeping on the sofa.

The events that captivate me most are the ones that test endurance – like long-distance cross-country skiing. I expect it's because in high school I was never any good at such sports. Being in good physical shape seemed to make no difference. I could run with the leading group until the last turn, and then my legs would turn into wooden toothpicks, and runners would pass me by as if I were a plough horse among thoroughbreds.

Watching those cross-country skiers exert maximum effort, skis flailing as they charged uphill, furiously thrusting themselves forward with their ski poles, I found myself leaning and straining with them. And when the race was over, I could feel it in my muscles.

Fortunately, but much to my frustration, on the really long events the coverage often cut away. The commentators assume that the audience will become bored, so they leave the skiing to chat with someone or to visit some of the cultural attractions of Italy. And there are a lot of those in Italy, going way back to the Roman Empire. But the attraction that our television host chose to visit was the awesome shopping mall in Turin, even more impressive than the Edmonton Mall, he said.

After a few commercials and another visit to the skeleton sled races, where the bodies were hurtling down the chute for a second time, the television cameras finally returned to the cross-country race just in time to catch the racers coming down the last hill into the arena. A new figure had joined the group of leaders sprinting toward the finish line. It would have been nice to see how he'd made the heroic push to catch up with the leaders, but it was still a thrill to see someone come from far behind in the pack to challenge those who thought they'd had the race sewed up.

Maybe the reason I like long races is that they give me a chance to watch the drama slowly unfold. I also like movies that take their time.

I happened to catch the cross-country sprint that was won by Chandra Crawford, a young woman from Canmore, Alberta. She wasn't expected to win a medal, but she whizzed across the finish line well ahead of everyone else. What struck me was how she finished: her mouth wide open laughing with surprise and delight. She looked as if she couldn't believe her good fortune. While the other skiers collapsed from exhaustion, she tore around in excitement, celebrating her unexpected win. Mounting the podium to receive her gold medal, she was the very image of joy. She was virtually bursting with it, and she had everyone laughing with her at her boundless glee.

It was one of those scenes that make you suddenly exclaim, "This is what the games are really about!" Chandra Crawford radiated the meaning of sport and play – for these are, after all, supposed to be games. Games are what children delight in playing, but you see relatively little delight at these so-called Olympic games.

In one of John Updike's stories, a perfect high dive performed by a high school athlete sparks a moment of revelation in his character: he has an epiphany, as this moment of exquisite grace gives him a glimpse into the new world, when all our actions will be full of grace and beauty. Seeing Crawford burst across the finish line with such grace and vigor reminded me of that epiphany. Although there were years of conditioning, practice and sacrifice behind that moment, it conveyed the impression of a sprezzatura effortlessness. The dancer and the dance were one.

Her fluid grace brought back an epiphany that came to me in high school. (Okay, I was a bit slow.) One of the girls I sat behind in some of my classes was a runner, and I went to watch her run. I was blown away by the effortless grace of her long stride. She looked as if she were floating along, as if she could go on running forever, defying all limits.

When I was growing up, girls didn't know how to run. They ran, well … like girls. Especially when they became teenagers. Of course, skirts were more or less still the rule then, so when they ran, most girls would more or less swing their legs to the side. It looked awkward. Most girls couldn't throw a baseball either.

Seeing Jeannie Miller run (I'm astonished that I still remember her name) suddenly brought home to me that girls ran the way they did not because they were girls but because of social conventions. They had never learned to run properly. The realization sent a pang through me: what a shame!

Running, especially running down the wooden sidewalks that stretched for blocks along 118th Avenue, sometimes gave me an ecstatic, almost spiritual experience. Wooden sidewalks add great bounce and lift to your stride. And sometimes as I raced down those sidewalks, virtually levitating, I'd be seized by the illusion that I could go on running like that forever without ever growing tired, that gravity had but a tenuous hold on me.

And then I'd suddenly run out of breath.

But I thought it a shame that most girls were cheated of that experience just because they were girls. It was kind of a Rousseauan moment for me. Till then I'd accepted the institutions and the conventions of society – family, church, school and everything in between – more or less as the way things were supposed to be. Not hindrances or forces that repressed or misshaped you, but simply there like streets and sidewalks to help you get wherever you wanted to go.

Rousseau was the thinker who put forward the notion that the institutions and conventions of our social order that supposedly civilize us actually deform us. I had not yet read Rousseau at the time, but my epiphany while watching Jeannie Miller run gave me an inkling that there could be a discrepancy between how our social order attempted to mold us and our natural, God-given nature.

At the same time, watching Jeannie run, and watching Chandra Crawford fly along on her skis, and watching a figure skater perform her program flawlessly, gliding and spinning and leaping as if her body were created for it and she were doing it just for its own sake like the antelope that go bounding across the prairies delighted at just being antelopes – such moments of play bring to life the possibility that the discipline and the body will one day fuse into a gracious freedom. For a moment there is no more tension between the outer demands and rules of the sport – the conventions – and the free bodily person performing the actions.

Not all the Olympic events sparked such epiphanies, of course. All too often it is obvious that the athletes are laboring under great external pressures and are driven by a serious sense of duty. There isn't just nervousness, but deep anxiety and fear of failure. They are not having much fun. For them these aren't games, but trials.

The Canadian hockey team seemed to be laboring the entire time. Some of the hockey players looked as if their skates were weighted with lead. There was no flow into the rhythm of the game – and they knew it. I feel sorry for them, not because they didn't get the gold, but because they didn't experience that thrill of clicking together as a team and making the game their own. Sometimes it just doesn't come together. In fact, such moments are few and far between in this present world.

As we were driving to work after watching Chandra Crawford's victory on early morning television, I saw a frail old man on the sidewalk along Linwell Drive. I've spotted him out for his early morning walk before, hobbling along painfully with his cane. He stopped beside a telephone pole and carefully propped his back up against it, using it to support him as he caught his breath.

His early morning jogs, it seems, are a terrific struggle for him. He is not a picture of grace, but he is an image of endurance – and of courage.

One day all those splendid athletes will be like that old man, their old age perhaps aggravated by old injuries contracted when they were young and vital. But they will remember those moments when they floated and were one with the dance.

Sometimes in my dreams I still go bounding down those wooden sidewalks in Beverly and the Highlands. And this time I finally conquer gravity altogether and I am literally running on air, going higher and higher, running effortlessly above the rooftops….

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Letters

Eurabia: The Euro-Arab axis

Thank you very much for the book review. It is very well done and makes some important points. I have read Bat Ye'or before but not this book. She is one of the few writers crying out in the wilderness of the naive, decadent secular West "beware!" Because her message is too frightening, demanding, convicting, people turn a deaf ear to it . . . until they can ignore it no longer.

The problem is deep down we know we created this situation. Our civilization violently killed its Christian soul and then proceeded to deconstruct its cultural patrimony. We decided to live for today and let tomorrow (and the people unfortunate enough to be around then) take care of itself. We had few children to inconvenience our lifestyles and simply bequeathed our land to whoever happens to move in to fill the void. In Europe . . . thus Eurabia.

Fr Lindsay Harrison

Protestant leaders propose creating World Reformed Communion

Geneva (ENI) – The leaders of two worldwide Reformed church groupings have proposed the creation of a new global body called the World Reformed Communion to unite the more than 80 million Protestants in their two organizations.

"We . . . believe that this new, united, Reformed body will be a blessing to the broader ecumenical movement and to the reconciliation of the world," said the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the Rev. Douwe Visser, president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), in a joint statement.

Geneva-based WARC has 75 million members in 218 churches in 107 countries, while the Grand Rapids, Michigan headquartered REC is in 25 countries with 12 million members belonging to 40 churches. There are 27 churches that belong to both groupings, which have been in bilateral talks since 1998.

The member churches of the two groupings trace their roots back to the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox and others, as well as earlier church reform movements such as the Waldensians in the Piedmont valleys of Italy and the followers of Jan Hus in the Czech lands.

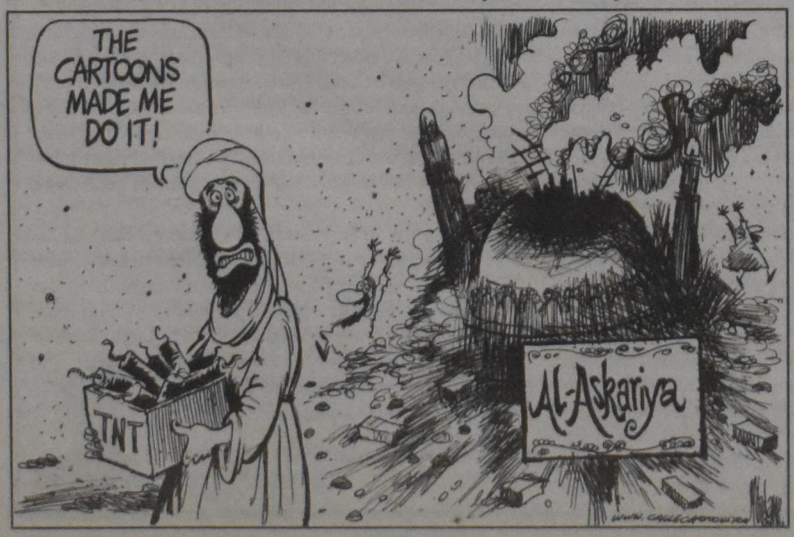
The unanimous recommendation to create the new body to succeed WARC and REC comes out of a meeting in Grand Rapids, where representatives of the two groupings met for two days ending February 1.

It needs to be ratified by the governing bodies of both WARC and REC.

Setri Nyomi, general secretary of WARC, hailed the recommendation. "We praise God for this historic development. In a world filled with divisions, the Reformed family is signaling with this proposal that we are ready to move beyond our divisions," he said.

His comments were echoed by Richard van Houten, REC's general secretary. "In the new World Reformed Communion, it is my prayer that our love and care for each other and our witness in the world will get an even better vehicle for expression than our two organizations separately have been," he noted.

According to the proposal, all current member churches of both bodies would become members of the World Reformed Communion. It also recommends that other Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, First Reformation, United and Uniting traditions that affirm the basis of the new body be invited to join.



Re: Speaking truth to power, CC Feb. 6, 06

You are correct – the recent federal election showed how impoverished our politics is. To attain power, much remained unspoken. But why conclude that no successful politician can speak the truth?

The system by which we conduct elections is not inevitable. Under a different voting system Canadian politics could be more honest. To think politics cannot be other than what we have is hopeless cynicism. Nor should we dismiss politicians as ethically challenged. Getting honest folk into politics solves little. Canada has a most unsuitable voting system which yields similar behavior, no matter who is in power. If you want greater honesty scrap the system that makes dishonesty rational.

For example, Manning's Reform Party of Canada began with principles and policies but could not attain power, or even make a significant contribution. Now, after several face-lifts, it is, under Harper, pragmatic and nearly indistinguishable from the Liberals. The only significant policy difference is the child-care package and spending for the military. On same-sex marriage Harper will not let parliament over-rule the courts, abortion he will not touch. Is that any different from the Liberals? That is Harper's achievement, making the Conservatives indistinguishable from the Liberals. You doubt it? Think of Emerson and Fortier. It is the price of power under the present system.

Our voting system is a winner-take-all system. Coming close does not count. To win requires "big-tent" politics. In Canada, under a proportional system no party would have a majority. Greater political diversity would participate in ruling. Parties could be players without selling their soul. (And our cities would have had Conservative Mps.)

But, one look at Europe shows not any proportional system yields incentives for honesty. For Canada, the greatest potential for politics based on cooperation, consensus, and mutual respect rests with the Single Transferable Vote as recommended by the British Columbia Citizens Assembly, last year. It uses a preferential ballot. Voters rank candidates.

Few candidates will ever be elected on the first count. Winning candidates must have second place support from voters whose first preference is for one's competitor. Think of the logic! Under such a system, is it rational to attack opponents and be negative? No, on the contrary, it pays to be nice, civil, thoughtful, and truthful.

Richmond, British Columbia has large ethnic communities. Some years ago a by-election for local council had the potential for much nastiness. The non-partisan association's membership swelled from a few hundred to thousands. Two rival Indo-Canadian groups, a Chinese-Canadian group, and the small remnant of Caucasians squared off for battle. To avert lasting divisions a preferential ballot was introduced. The three large groups, practising politics as usual, thrived on fostering animosity between each other. The lone Caucasian built bridges to all camps – and won. That voting system rewards civility.

Redeeming politics requires systemic change, not preaching. It is sustained by the conviction that what we have need not be. There is a better way.

Nick Loenen
Richmond, BC

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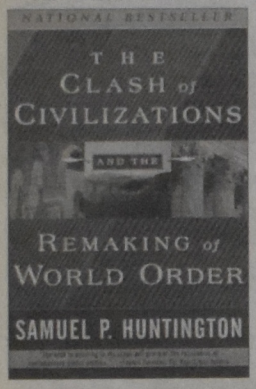
Thought

The sexual clash of civilizations

Albert Mohler

In the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain, prominent writer V. S. Naipaul declared the dawn of a "universal civilization." According to Naipaul's vision, the end of the Cold War was a signal that the entire planet was moving toward a single civilizational form that would transcend ethnic differences, ideological cleavages, and the fault lines that have separated cultures in the past.

As events were soon to demonstrate, this "universal civilization" did not come to pass. To the contrary, the fissures of our contemporary conflicts tend to fall precisely along civilizational lines. The great prophet of civilizational conflict is Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington, whose seminal 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, set the terms for a debate that, in our post 9/11 world, is still very much on the front burner.



Rejecting the idea of any comprehensive global civilization, Huntington argued that a clash between civilizations is the primary cause of conflict on the global scene today. While acknowledging that virtually all civilizations hold certain shared beliefs, Huntington argues that these beliefs are minimal and clearly insufficient to avoid deadly conflict.

Huntington, who directs the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies and also serves as chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, was director of security planning for the National Security Council during the Carter administration. His book and thesis set the table for a scholarly debate that raged on college campuses until it became a concern to millions on September 11, 2001.

Huntington argues that the West "is and will remain for years to come the most powerful civilization." Yet, Huntington sees Western power declining relative to other civilizations. Even as the West seeks to assert its worldview and interests, non-Western societies challenge its power and dominance.

As Huntington sees the world, the current pattern is a global structure of seven or eight major civilizations, each competing for its own interest and values. As he explains, the leading countries of the world represent different civilizations as well as different interests.

The potential for conflict becomes clear: "The local conflicts most likely to escalate into broader wars are those between groups and state from different civilizations. The predominant patterns of political and economic development differ from civilization to civilization. The key issues on the international agenda involve difference among civilizations. Power is shifting from the long predominant west to non-Western civilizations. Global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational." Other scholars and strategic thinkers have argued with details in Huntington's analysis. Nevertheless, the basic structure of his argument is difficult to refute.

If any one civilizational conflict appears most likely to escalate into a broader threat to world peace, Huntington points to the clash between the West and the Islamic civilization.

As Bernard Lewis, another formidable scholar of world affairs, comments: "It should now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations – that perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the world-wide expansion of both."

What Lewis identifies as "our secular present" may represent the greatest flash point of conflict.

In a fascinating article published earlier this year in the journal Foreign Policy, researchers Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris argue that the real clash between civilizations is not about democracy – but sex.

Inglehart and Norris insist that some concept of democracy is claimed now by almost every government and regime. Peoples throughout the world claim to desire democracy and to want political freedom. Yet, at the same time, the actual content and character of democracy is very much up for grabs.

Mood swings in the church

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

We all have mood swings – some of them caused by chemical and hormonal shifts, some caused by the events of the day, and others seemingly just by the weather. Now the church is a multi-faceted organism and generalizations cannot be true to all the data, but I want to venture describing one mood swing in the church.

I was reading an "old" book written by some of the Institute for Christian Studies professors entitled *Out of Concern for the Church* (1970). It's quite a marvelous rhetorical piece in many ways, with a language that is testy, idealistic, and provocative. In one of the essays, John Olthuis describes a dream in which Christian influence becomes predominant in the land. The Christian political party is the lead opposition in parliament, Christian schools receive equal funding from the government, the Christian weekly *Meaning* has replaced *Playboy* as the bestselling magazine, and Christian labor, Christian counseling, and Christian arts have a respectable standing in broader culture. It reads like Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech in its sweet hopefulness.

There was an enthusiasm, a sense of empowerment – even triumphalism – in those days that has faded over the years. Sure, there are some pockets of people who still dream of making the country Christian, or sparking a revival that takes the province "by storm." But Christian professors are reluctant to speak so confidently of such a dream. They might even say such a dream is no longer desirable in a multi-faith country.

From triumphalism to melancholy

A fascinating read is Lamin Sanneh's *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (2003), which turns the tables on all the clichés of Christian imperialism in Africa. "Europe is not host to Africa in the things of God," he insists.

What is instructive to me is his characterizations of Western Christianity – or the remains of it. He claims that the West is no longer Christian, and Christianity is no longer Western. The vestiges of the Western church, he says, suffer from a guilt complex. He explains:

> About the decline [of faith in Europe], the statistics are unequivocal. But beneath and beyond that has been a strategic retreat into isolation for the spirit seems to be wilting. It has taken the form of a mood swing in which people have been preoccupied with taking stock, with the setting sun and lengthening shadows, memorial armbands, with shades of gray, with requiem. . . . The religious imagination seems to have been hit with a bout of melancholy as it labors with the strains of "Abide with me, fast falls the even tide," and "The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended, the darkness falls at thy behest." . . . It's a far cry from the confident, robust tones of "Onward, Christian soldiers," or "Stand up, stand up for Jesus!" It's as if Europeans . . . so regret having to celebrate Christmas or Easter. Maybe too much history is a bad thing.

Although he is speaking of primarily of Europe, it is likely that North America, especially mainline churches, are not far behind. I sense some of this melancholy and introspection in our own circles at times. At worst, it is a loss of nerve, a paralysis.

To an extent many are grieving of the loss of Christendom – the loss of privilege with regards to the nation-state. This is coupled with a fear of repeating sins of the past, like the Crusades, cruel doctrinal disputes, and the subjugation of First Nations people. We are a faith in depression, tired by our checkered history.

Perpetual crisis, persistent courage

How do we discern these moods? I would not advocate a return to our triumphalistic past. There was a naïveté in our enthusiasm, an unwariness with regards to our own shortcomings. In many ways, we did not recognize that the church is always in crisis, caught in-between what it ought to be and what it is, caught between the already and the not yet. We lunge for the crown, by-passing the cross.

On the other hand, a culture of lament is short-sighted as well. Yes, the church is in crisis. It always has been, and always will be until Christ returns. We need to pray for courage, and follow the Spirit's lead in the midst of a broader culture that is sad with its individualistic materialism and spiritual homelessness. If we can find the resolve not to be lost in that murky soup, there is still good news to be shared.

There is a time to laugh and a time to mourn. Our moods, however, can master us to the point that we can miss God's call. The fact is, God's Spirit is moving mightily in the South (of the globe), and there is a vibrancy of faith there in the midst of all kinds of crisis. Perhaps their example can prod us to a levity beyond the weight of our guilt, our possessions, and as Lamin suggests, "too much history."

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

Stewardship

In "The True Clash of Civilizations," Inglehart and Norris state their case: "Although nearly the entire world pays lip service to democracy, there is still no global consensus on the self-expression values – such as social tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech, and interpersonal trust – that are crucial to democracy. Today, these divergent values constitute the real clash between Muslim societies and the West."

Inglehart and Norris base their argument on data from two different periods covered by the World Values Survey [WVS], covering the years 1995-96 and 2000-2002. The WVS explores worldview beliefs and values in more than 70 countries. According to Inglehart and Norris, "the WVS is an investigation of sociocultural and political change that encompasses over 80 percent of the world's population."

According to the data from the WVS reports, culture determines values. But, where Huntington pointed to a worldwide clash over political values, Inglehart and Norris argue that "the real fault line between the West and Islam . . . concerns gender equality and sexual liberalization." Or, as these researchers assert, "the values separating the two cultures have more to do with eros than demos."

The clearest evidence for this fundamental clash is seen in the radical difference between the sexual mores found in the modern West and those of the Islamic world. As has been well documented in the rantings of Osama Bin Laden, many Muslims see the sexual permissiveness of American culture [joined by the rest of the West] as a sign of a terminal sickness at the heart of western civilization.

On issues ranging from marriage to divorce to abortion to homosexuality and to the role of men and women, a vast chasm now separates the Islamic world from post-Christian societies in the West.

Inglehart and Norris also point to a basic conflict over the role of religious authority within the civilizations. The separation of religious and secular authorities in the secularized West is not a pattern admired by the Islamic masses or their leaders. The decline of Christianity's binding authority in Europe and North America is all the evidence many Muslims need to know that western-style democracy is not a future they will chose.

This thesis of a sexual clash of civilizations points to realities far more complicated than the clash between the secular West and Islam. The furor over the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson as the first openly-homosexual bishop in a major denomination [Episcopal Church, USA] reveals a sexual clash of civilizations within Christianity itself. The leaders of the opposition movement against the normalization of homosexuality in the Anglican Communion are from what is known as the "Global South", encompassing Africa, southern Asia, and much of South America.

At the same time, this conflict is about more than geography. Christian believers committed to biblical orthodoxy throughout North America and western Europe, though dwindling in number, still hold tenaciously to biblical morality and patterns of sex and marriage – even against the liberalizing tendencies of some branches of institutional Christianity.

Perhaps the most interesting civilizational conflict is found at the fault-lines between orthodox Christianity and the secular world. When it comes to the destruction of the family, the undermining of marriage, and the unleashing of eros into sexual anarchy, the "true believers" remaining in Christendom have found what amounts to a bridge too far.

Inglehart and Norris are undoubtedly right when pointing to a sexual clash of civilizations as an important global reality. What they missed is a sexual clash of civilizations found right here at home, where millions of Americans share a fundamental hope for democracy, but inhabit different worlds when it comes to sexual morality.

You do not have to go around the world to find a sexual clash of civilizations. Just turn on your television.

Albert Mohler is President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This article originally appeared on November 12, 2003.

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Tithing: Giving basics

Giving is a sensitive topic because it is very personal – and that is as it should be. Giving is not something that we must do but rather something we want to do. Giving is more than just money. It includes the giving of my time, talents, use of my home, business, farm, and possessions. Giving is from the heart – it's a love/gratitude thing.

Yet, the Bible clearly teaches about the tithe – the giving of a tenth of your harvest (your earnings). Even today, those that do faithfully tithe or give even more, testify what a source of blessing it is for them. The tithe is not just an Old Testament obedience thing: even Jesus affirmed the tithe as a practice that should be continued (Matt. 23:23).

The Bible also teaches that everything that I have received from the Lord is really his. All one hundred per cent, not just what I tithe. It is my responsibility to be wise with what the Lord has entrusted to me, to my stewardship. King David, in Chronicles 29: 14, captures this so eloquently when he testifies: "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."

David reveled in the willing response of his people to his request to provide for the building of the Temple. I picture David as emotionally overcome with gratitude to God as he humbly submits that, what he and his people have done is possible because of God's blessing.

Tithing was a common practice for many different people in the days of Abram. It was common for people to give gifts of 10 per cent to their gods – to please and appease them, to ensure success for them as a people.

We read about the first occurrence of the tenth or tithe in the Bible in Genesis 14: 21b. It is Abram's response to the blessing he receives from Melchizedek, King of Salam. Abram has just come back from a rescuing his nephew Lot from King Kedorlaomer and his associates. Melchizedek blesses Abram in this way: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Gen. 14:19/20a

In response to this blessing we read: "Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." Gen. 14:20b

For many of us, giving is need driven. We respond when there is a need that tugs at us. I think tithing is different from that kind of giving. When God instructed Moses to set up the tabernacle and set aside the Levites to be the custodians, God also established the tithe. It became God's provision (fundraising tool) that would provide for the tabernacle and the ministry of the priests and Levites.

Similarly, today, there is a parallel in the support of the work of our church and denominational ministries. The tithe is based on blessing, not on a fixed amount or even a budget, and is the starting guideline for regular ongoing giving. It is a starting point in our giving, especially for those who have been entrusted with abundance. Generous giving goes beyond the tithe.

If you aren't tithing, please reconsider. In the last book of the Old Testament, we read that the Israelites had neglected several practices that set them apart as God's people: one of them was tithing. This is what God, through his prophet Malachi wrote:

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Malachi 3:8-10

God's people no longer had a heart for God. They had forgotten him. But even so God was willing to unleash a flood of blessing, if their hearts would turn to him. That promise is true for us too, if are hearts willing.

Consider tithing. God enables you to give and may enable you to go much beyond just a tithe! The important question is: Where is your heart for God? Giving is a visible act of worship, a response of love and gratitude for all that God has done for you.

Stewardly Tip: Pray and Act. Review where you are at when it comes to the giving of your time, talents, money and possessions to the work of your church and other Kingdom causes. It helps to also consider how God has been faithful to you. Together with your spouse, prayerfully commit to tithe (or work out a plan to get there) a tithe of your time and income for the work of your church and other Kingdom causes.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Christian Education – a Community Stewardship Challenge

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

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Cartoons spark violent attacks in Northern Nigeria

Up to a hundred people may have died in the violence that rocked parts of northern Nigerian on February 18 following the publication in Europe of cartoons satirizing the prophet Mohammed.

Sources in northern Nigeria report that at least 30 churches and 250 shops and houses were destroyed in Borno State, when a peaceful protest in the capital city Maiduguri turned violent and a crowd armed with sticks, machetes and iron bars rampaged through the town destroying Christian properties and targeting members of the clergy.

Father Gajere, priest of St. Rita's Catholic Church was burned to death in his home along with his domestic staff, and the residence of the Catholic Bishop of Maiduguri diocese was torched. In one incident a husband and wife in Gamboro lost their six children and all of their belongings when their house was torched, and in another a mob placed a tyre around one man, doused him with petrol and set him on fire. Eyewitnesses report that corpses were piling up in hospitals in Maiduguri due to a lack of sufficient burial sites for casualties of the violence.

The Borno police force reported that it had arrested 115 people. However, the violence only abated when the Nigerian army was sent to the area to assist the police in peace keeping, following desperate appeals by local Christians for an evacuation and a curfew.

On the same day sources in Katsina State reported attacks on the Christian and Igbo properties in the capital city. Although a curfew was quickly put in place, reports indicate a death toll of at least seven, although the local police force insisted that one rioter had died, two police officers were injured and 25 people arrested during the violence. Religious tension was also reported to be growing in Kano and Niger States.

Tension also escalated in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, in the lead up to the violence in Maiduguri with an increase in armed robbery and a particularly violent attack on a prominent Christian family. In Wase, southern Plateau state. Muslim students stabbed the driver of a car and critically injured a pregnant woman and seven others after a road incident

At least 50,000 people have died in religious violence in northern and central Nigerian since 2000, when a number of northern states began to adopt the Shari'ah penal code, creating a de-facto state religion in violation of Nigeria's secular constitution.

Borno state has recently seen an increase in Muslim militancy as the Al Sunna Wal Jamma or 'Taliban' group has begun to target Christian settlements and government installations, retreating into neighboring countries when challenged by the Nigerian security forces.

The Most Reverend Peter J Akinola, Primate of all Nigeria and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, has said, "That an incident in far away Denmark which does not claim to be representing Christianity could elicit such an unfortunate reaction here in Nigeria, leading to the destruction of Christian Churches, is not only embarrassing, but also disturbing and unfortunate."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas added, "A strong and consistent response is needed by the Government of Nigeria to restore order and bring an end to this alarming escalation of violence. We urge the federal government to ensure that victims receive adequate compensation and damaged or destroyed properties are rebuilt as a matter of urgency."

Islamic conference condemns calls for death of Danish cartoonist

Sheraz Khuram Khan

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN (ANS) – Rejecting calls for the death of the Danish Cartoonist who satirized Prophet Muhammad, Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu termed them un-Islamic.

He was talking to journalists in Islamabad on Tuesday, Feb 21. Urging Muslims to stay away from violent protests, the Secretary General of 57-member pan-Islamic body said that issuance of ruling to kill people was not a joke and nobody had an authority to issue such a ruling.

Ihsanoglu maintained that setting fire to vehicles and ransacking buildings during anti-cartoon protests ran contrary to the spirit of Islam.

The secretary general of OIC also expressed disapproval of the calls of boycott of Danish and European products across Muslim world.

He said that OIC was engaged in efforts to seek assurance from the EU that there would be no repeat of such incidents. He also called upon the west to ensure that dignity of Islam was respected.

Expressing his regret at the failure of some newspapers and governments to apologize to Muslims over publication of the controversial cartoons, he rejected their justification that they had published the cartoons under the umbrella of freedom of expression.

Pakistani churches torched over blasphemy rumor

Government quick to condemn violence but slow to act.

By Peter Lamprecht

ISTANBUL (Compass) – A crowd of 500 Muslims burned down two Pakistani churches and a convent school yesterday in the southern province of Sindh, reportedly over an incident of Quran desecration.

St. Mary's Catholic Church and St. Savior's Church of Pakistan were attacked in Sukkur at 5: 30 p.m. by a crowd wielding gasoline bombs and other inflammatory chemicals, Vicar General John Murad of the Hyderabad Diocese said. Police and paramilitary troops were called in to restore order but arrived at the scene after the churches had been gutted.

Pakistani media and government sources stated that the attack was triggered by rumors that a Christian threw a copy of the Quran into a trash can. But local sources said that the violence occurred after a Muslim was arrested at 2 p.m. for allegedly burning pages of the Quran and trying to frame his Christian father-in-law, Saleem Gill, with the deed.

Burning the Quran is punishable with life imprisonment under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Children gathered and began to throw rocks at St. Savior's Church around 5 p.m., prompting Pastor Ilyas Saeed Masih to contact local and provincial police, Murad told Compass. But despite assurances that they were on their way, law enforcement had not yet arrived when the group of 500 attacked the church, Murad said.

Using fuel bombs and other inflammatory chemicals, the mob torched the inside of St. Savior's, destroying 800 Bibles, hymnbooks and the rest of the furniture, as well as burning two motorbikes and a car that were parked outside the building.

When the mob refocused its efforts on Pastor Masih's home, located next to the church, he and his family escaped through a back window. The Muslims emptied the house of all its belongings, including a washing machine, telephone and furniture, and torched them on the road in front of the church.

The group then marched to St. Mary's Catholic Church, five minutes away, and destroyed the 120-year-old building along with the convent school located in the same compound. Two nun's and six trainees fled the site as the mob set the church and school alight, breaking a statue of Mary to pieces.

"They burned it completely, only the walls are standing with a shabby roof," Murad told Compass from the ruins of the church.

Murad, who traveled to Sukkur with Catholic Bishop Max Roderick to assess the damage, said fire and police units did not show up until two hours after the attack. "The pastors informed the police and the whole administration, but they did not respond immediately," Murad commented. "The fire brigade did not come, and there was not a single policeman there."

Local police chief Akbar Arain told the Associated Press that one person was injured when law enforcement eventually arrived on the scene and fired tear gas to disperse the crowd.

With a population of 1.5 million, Sukkur has traditionally experienced very little violence against its tiny minority of 7,000 Christians, Murad commented. In 1994 there had been allegations of blasphemy against a nun, but these were resolved peacefully, he said.

The facts in yesterday's alleged Quran-burning are yet to be confirmed, but regardless of the specifics Murad said one reason the attack occurred was that "emotions were already high" over caricatures of the prophet Muhammad published in Europe.

Anti-cartoon demonstrations

At least five people died in Pakistan last week during violent anti-cartoon demonstrations that rocked the cities of Peshawar and Lahore. Protests against the drawings had taken place almost daily in Sukkur, Agence-France Presse reported.

In contrast to belated police efforts to subdue the attacks, Sindh Gov. Ishratul Ibad was quick in responding. Ibad ordered authorities to take measures to protect people of all religions, *Dawn* newspaper reported today, directing officials to "carry out a survey of the losses of churches and to compensate them by getting them restored to their original condition."

From self-imposed exile in London, Muslim political leader Altaf Hussain also condemned the church attacks and said that they were being used by "mischief mongers for the sake of political mileage," Dawn reported. The chief of the Mutahidda Qaumi Movement, which holds considerable sway in Sindh, called on the government to protect religious minorities.

Contradictory reports have been given as to the number of people that were arrested over the church attacks. A statement from Pakistan's National Council of Churches echoed a *Daily Times* article, saying that the government had already arrested over 100 people on charges of damaging public property.

But Samuel Nadeem of St. Savior's Church today told the Lahore-based Center for Legal Aid and Settlement that police had only arrested two people.

It is also yet to be seen whether the government will follow through on its decision to pay for church restoration. In the Punjab town of Sangla Hill, the government has not yet fulfilled promises to reconstruct churches and Christian homes that were attacked in November over allegations a Christian had tried to burn copies of the Quran.

"The government has refused to rebuild the burnt house and churches, but just wanted to repair them," Father Samson Dilawar told Compass from Sangla Hill. "But we also do not know when and how."

He said that he had not yet seen any of the money that Pakistani-U.S. women in Virginia reportedly raised last month to help rebuild Sangla Hill's Catholic and Presbyterian churches. Three Muslim women hosted a dinner at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society on January 21 to raise funds to pay for previous destruction by a Muslim mob.

In a statement today condemning the attack in Sukkur, the National Commission for Peace and Justice (NCJP), a Christian civil rights organization, compared the incident with the earlier Sangla Hill attacks.

"A willful negligence on the part of the law enforcing agencies was a common feature in all these incidents," NCJP Executive Secretary Peter Jacob commented. "Properties and places of worship of the religious minorities are increasingly becoming a target by the extremist attacks."

Church

Event in India shows extent of fear of Christianity

Vishal Arora

DANGS, India, February 14 (Compass) – Christianity is a major threat to Indian nationalism, organizers of a "reconversion" rally held last weekend in Gujarat indicated yesterday during the closing ceremony.

Organizers of the Shabri Kumbh led the 60,000-strong crowd to repeat, "I will save my religion … I will save my community from fraudulent conversions … I will save those who have fallen prey to allurement tactics of the enemy of our country to reconvert to Hinduism." The throng often shouted, "Jai Shri Ram (Praise be to the god Rama)."

The assembly resolved to save the Hindu religion and Bharat Mata (Mother India goddess) by reconverting Christians.

Sadhvi Ritambhara, a popular Hindu preacher whose programs are aired on several TV channels, said, "They [Christians] call us harvest. They intend to pluck us out. And foreigners want to do this to us."

Ritambhara said it was imperative for Hindus to take up arms to save their religion.

"It is our own people who help foreigners to succeed in their schemes," she said. "And they convert tribal people in the garb of education and social service."

She also alleged that missionaries convert poor tribal people by using deception, such as immersing in water both a stone idol of Rama and a wooden cross, then saying that Rama drowned but Christ did not.

"But we believe in test by fire – set fire to both the idol of Rama and the cross, and you will see that the cross will burn down, but Rama will stay," she said.

Ritambhara encouraged the gathering to mobilize friends to stand against the enemy and continue to work till the whole country was "saffronized." The saffron-colored flag of the extremist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a symbol of Hindutva nationalist ideology.

Finally, Ratumbha said that those who did not love the country should not be allowed to live in it.

'Threat to the Nation'

Shankaracharya Vasunandan, chief guest at the function, said that "foreign forces" could be defeated only if Hindus were united and revived.

"Conversion is a great challenge and threat to the nation," Vasunandan said, even claiming

Sadhvi Ritambhara

the Christian church was behind Naxal, a violent group whose roots are actually based in communism. He also reiterated the common assumption that all Indians were originally Hindus.

Vasunandan encouraged the crowd to help stop conversions and quickly reconvert Christians. "Dedicate your mind, body, and money for this cause," he said.

He also said that the event would not end with Monday's ceremony. "Many more such programs will be organized in different parts of the country," he said.

The organizers honored various Hindus who have reconverted people to Hinduism: Shani Ram Ji Maharaj for reconversion of Christians in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, and Sindhu Tai for her orphanage in Maharashtra state, which leaders said prevented 1,000 children from converting to Christianity.

"We will not tolerate the coming of foreign missionaries to our country," Tai said.

'An Alarming Pace'

Anti-conversion posters adorned the kumbh stage, whose backdrop consisted of a huge picture of the god Rama killing the demon Ravana.

"Conversions are taking place at an alarming pace," one poster warned, attributing the quote to Swami Vishweshwar Tirth Maharaj. "If we do not solve this problem, Hinduism will be abolished."

Another poster, quoting Padambhooshan Rani Mai Dintyu, warned, "Every other day we hear in Christian newsletters that India is the mission field of Western nations, and they will convert India into a Christian nation."

Hindus account for about 80 percent of India's 1.1 billion people, and Christians less than 3 percent. Christians, however, make up about 15 percent of the Dangs district population.

Conversion a national issue

A number of Hindu sadhus, or leaders, also took part in a summit during the kumbh, in which they passed a resolution demanding that the central government take serious note of conversion issues in tribal areas and enact laws to prevent them. The resolution was read to participants at the event.

The resolution stated that in the absence of any central or national law, state governments should enact their own laws to "save the tribal population."

The leaders also claimed that anti-conversion laws formed by the state governments of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Gujarat and Orissa have proved ineffective because of loopholes.

Christian economists say poverty "is the fruit of deliberate policy"

Jerry L. Van Marter

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil – Poverty is no accident, but is the product of unjust economic structures that churches must struggle to reform, a Ugandan economist told a gathering of world church leaders here during the week-long assembly held Feb. 14 - 22.

"Poverty doesn't just 'exist'– it is manufactured by those who control the markets," said Yashpal Tandon, executive director of the South Center in Geneva, Switzerland, a think-tank that deals with issues of trade and economic development in Africa. He made his remarks during a news conference during the ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

"Poverty is not a natural phenomenon, but is the fruit of deiberate policy, and churches must challenge the economic institutions that create and perpetuate the policies," the Ugandan economist said, speaking in the city where the first World Social Forum was held.

The WCC, which has spoken out on economic-justice issues throughout its 58-year existence, declared during its last Assembly (1998) that "the logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity."

Since that gathering, in Harare, Zimbabwe, a WCC commission has launched "Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth" (AGAPE), a call to churches to commit themselves to the eradication of poverty, promotion of fair trade, debt forgiveness and responsible lending, sustainable management of the earth's resources, supporting humans' rights to food, water and public services, land reform, and decent jobs and just wages.

"A world without poverty is not only possible, but is in keeping with the grace of God for the world," the AGAPE founding document says, adding that churches' efforts must be grounded in sound Biblical and theological perspectives.

"The spirituality of the market economy has taken complete possession of some sectors of Christianity," said Brazilian Methodist pastor and theologian Nancy Cardoso Pereira. "Capitalist transnational corporations want more than just greater profits. They want 'the kingdom, the power and the glory.'"

Those who would make a god of capitalism are wise to heed the words of the prophet Ezekiel, Pereira said: "By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth, and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud.... You think you are wise, as wise as a God.... Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence and you sinned" (Ezekiel 28: 2-6, 16-18).

Still, a centralized Marxist economy is not a workable alternative, said Russian Orthodox Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, who nonetheless told the media, "The current (free-market) system shows many signs of being a danger to democracy – non-elected and non-controllable forces are controlling the world, and they have no morality and do not listen to civil society."

In February 2004, Chaplin said, the Russian Orthodox Church took the lead in developing a "Code of Moral Principles and Rules in Economy" that he said is based on the Ten Commandments and is gaining traction throughout Russia. "We should establish such an economic order to realize in a harmonious way both spiritual aspirations and the material interests of both the individual and society," Chaplin told the Assembly, the highest governing body of the WCC, which meets once every seven years.

With so-called "free-trade agreements," government import and export subsidies, international monetary and banking institutions and multinational corporations operating with impunity around the world, Tandon said, "the free market system is a myth – it never existed, nor will it ever."

The challenge to the churches, he said, is to offer alternatives to the current scheme. "People everywhere are engaged in working out their own partial solutions out of their experiments in survival strategies," he said, "but the foremost challenge of our epoch is to change the whole edifice of global production and exchange."

The role of the churches, Pereira said, is to articulate the values on which a new global economic system must be based.

One of those values must be cooperation, Tandon said. "Capitalism is based on competition and greed, and structurally negates cooperation," he said. "Socialism, which is based on cooperation, has not always worked, but people everywhere are trying many cooperative models. Most all of them haven't moved beyond the local, but they are alternative systems."

For example, assembly delegates were told about the Focolare Movement, created in Italy by Chiara Lubich during World War II. Participating businesses agree to divide their profits three ways – the first part for reinvestment; the second for the establishment of new Focolare-related businesses; and the third for direct aid to people in need.

Another model, presented to the Assembly by the United Nations-affiliated International Labour Organization, focuses on educational opportunity, eradication of child labor, economic development that creates sustainable employment with just wages, and, in cooperation with the WCC, ecumenical dialogue that leads to collaboration on specific economic issues.

"The function of religion in economic exchange does not consist of establishing regulations and procedures," Pereira said, "but of determining value, formulating economic values, helping to shape structures and strengthening assessment mechanisms."

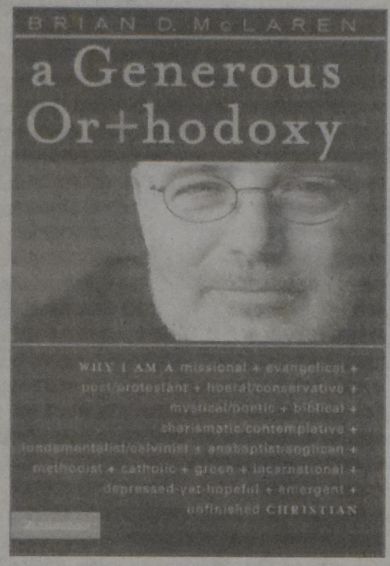
Evangelism/Sports

A doomed mission strategy?

John Bolt

I'm not sure where the practice started, but most televised American college and professional football (NFL) games feature the end zone presence of an evangelistic message: a stadium fan holding up a home-made sign reading "John 3:16." Every point-after-touchdown and every field-goal attempt puts "John 3:16" in the line of the camera and in front of the television audience, again and again.

Whether this is an effective witness or not in reaching lost souls I do not know. It is remarkable, however, general biblical illiteracy notwithstanding, that no explanation seems necessary for the viewing public. Can we assume that all football fans in America just know this much-loved verse that "God so loved the world . . ."? If so, we should rejoice – the public square is not entirely naked yet and part of its wardrobe remains identifiably Christian. Every fall weekend, Saturdays and Sundays, America is reminded on national T.V. – "God so loved the world . . . !" Surely, that's a good thing, isn't it?


BRIAN D. McLAREN
a Generous Or+hodoxy
WHY I AM A missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/calvinist + anabaptist/anglican + methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished CHRISTIAN

Liberal fundamentalism?

On further reflection, perhaps this is not so surprising. After all, is this not the single message that liberal, and now, increasingly, evangelical churches have been preaching – "God loves the world"? Now I am making a number of large leaps here, also in logic. After all, as thoughtful readers will no doubt have observed, I moved from citing the "John 3:16" sign to a reduced reading of the text, citing only the opening words and not paying attention to "whoever believes" or, more importantly, to "will not perish"! Even John 3:16, as the football stadium sign-holders undoubtedly know, cannot be reduced to the general liberal Christian platitude that "God loves the world."

Yet, so it seems to me, that is exactly the message that is beginning to dominate much of the evangelical world in North America. With the zeal of ex-smokers on anti-smoking crusades, evangelical leaders such as Brian McLaren repudiate their "judgmental" fundamentalist past and openly advocate a new Christianity that is "generous," that is more humble and compassionate than the dogmatic and arrogantly imperious Religious Right.

Still, in keeping with the charming inclusivity displayed in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, where McLaren claims to be Calvinist and an Arminian, Protestant and Roman Catholic and Orthodox, liberal and conservative, Anglican and Methodist, McLaren is also willing to call himself a "fundamentalist." But what does he mean by the label? Here's how he puts it: "For me the 'fundamentals of the faith' boil down to those given by Jesus: to love God and to love our neighbors." (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, 184). Adolf von Harnack would have been pleased; McLaren has given us, as a definition of "fundamentalist" no less, the classic definition of liberal culture Protestantism (Kulturprotestantismus).

What McLaren then does with the actual fundamentals of the early twentieth-century "modernist-versus-fundamentalist" debate, fundamentals such as the atonement, becomes doubly disappointing. In his dialogic volume, *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (p. 102), McLaren has one of his characters provide this critique of substitutionary atonement: "That sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse. You know?" In its place is proposed a "powerful weakness" theory, a notion of exemplary divine vulnerability (pp. 105-108). If God is love alone, there seems to be no place for God's wrath or for divine punishment of sin.

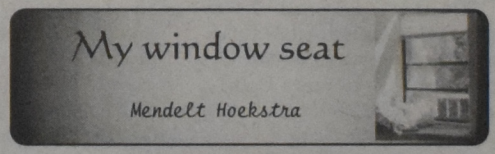
No more original sin?

An even more emphatic turn to a God who is only love is taken by British evangelical leader Steve Chalke in his book *The Lost Message of Jesus*. (I am indebted for this reference to D. A. Carson's superb book on the emergent church, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* [Zondervan, 2005], pp. 182ff.) For Chalke the concern that the church practically become more loving to the loveless, the marginalized, prostitutes, drug users and homosexuals, leads him to define God in terms of love alone. He claims: "The Bible in fact never defines this as anything other than love. But more than that, it never makes assertions about his anger, power or judgment independently of his love." D. A. Carson's critique goes straight for the jugular when he notes, "The first of these two sentences is false.... The second is manipulative; it would be as true to say that the Bible never makes assertions about God's love independently of consideration of his holiness." (183)

Of course, Chalke's position also requires a recasting of the biblical doctrine of sin. Here's his take on original sin.

While we have spent centuries arguing over the doctrine of original sin, pouring over the Bible and huge theological tomes to prove the inherent sinfulness of all humankind, we have missed a startling point: Jesus believed in original goodness! God

Where's the gold?



The 2006 Olympic Games are winding down in Torino, Italy and I am a sucker for the Olympics. I can remember exactly where I was when Ben Johnson beat the world at Seoul in 1988. I can also remember exactly where I was when I heard that he was stripped for doping. I can remember exactly where I was when I first saw "Eddie the Eagle" in 1988 in Calgary and where I was when I saw Donavan Bailey win the Men's 100 metre in 1996 in Atlanta.

During the Olympics, I find myself following sports that I normally never follow such as biathlon or luge. Like most people, sports seem to mean much more to me when there is a flag involved.

In four years Canada is planning to host the world in Vancouver for the 21st Winter Olympic Games. There was a Toronto group that bid on the 2008 summer games and lost it to Beijing. They spent 40 million dollars (half of it taxpayers money) to lose. The Vancouver group spent 18 million dollars to get the games to come to their neighborhood, and a spokesperson for that bid group heralded that these games will be an "economic boost for the region and will put Vancouver on the world map."

Isn't Vancouver already on the world map?

Proponents of the Olympic Games will say that one of the major advantages of hosting the games will be tourism. Olympic Games are no longer tourist events. They have become media events where Joe Public has very little access to.

The estimated cost of the Vancouver games is 650 million dollars and rising. That money will most likely be split between the federal and provincial government. Any profit will go to the corporate sponsors and any deficit run will be taken out of your and my pockets. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had the government promise in writing that if there is cost overrun, the country will be responsible for it.

I have not been one to complain much about my taxes. Our Federal Government takes more than 400 dollars from each of my paychecks and I usually do not blink an eye. I do not complain for the very reason that I use most of my tax money in other ways. I have been blessed to see God's wonder in countless government run parks, hiked and biked numerous trails that are kept clean by our government and been in hospitals throughout my life without paying more than parking. Where I start to raise an eyebrow is when events such as the Olympic Games come and we have Canadian cities bid for these games. I love sports but I do not love paying for things without accountability.

Generally accepted is the notion that the best games ever held from a fiscal point of view were the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. Not only were all venues ready well before the games began, but the games were on budget, unlike the debt-drenched 1976 Montreal Olympics.

If our government believes that hosting Olympic Games in our country is a good idea, why not go back to Calgary? When there are facilities in Calgary that are functional, why build a whole new set in Vancouver? Does Canada need two bobsled or ski jump areas within such a small geographical area of 1100 kilometres?

If our government feels that we should spend money on sports, and I do agree that we should, let us spend it on facilities ordinary people can use. We should build more small arenas. We should build more soccer fields, baseball diamonds and running tracks. We should build more swimming pools and have people staff them so our children can be active. We should provide more gym instructors, and coaches. While we are going to spend all this money in 2010, a better value for 650 million dollars would have been 650, one million dollar parks built across this great nation for the common athlete to use. Less obesity, less crime, healthier people....

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with Marisa and their two children.

A doomed mission strategy? continued

declared that all his creation, including humankind, was very good. That's not to suggest that Jesus is denying that our relationship with God is in need of reconciliation, but that he is rejecting any idea that we are, somehow, beyond the pale. (cited by Carson, 183)

Carson rightly points out that Jesus in fact believed that the human heart was evil (see Mark 7:21-23) and that while it is proper to speak of original goodness with respect to the pre-fall creation, it is hardly true of the post-lapsarian situation. This is such basic theology that Chalke's provocative claim above is really quite disingenuous and even irresponsible.

Forgiven people in hell?

Grand Rapids's own Rob Bell, founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, one of the largest "emergent churches" in the nation, takes this even a step further in the following remarkable set of claims (*Velvet Elvis*, 145-146):

"And when Jesus died on the cross he died for everybody.

"Everybody.

"Everywhere.

"Every tribe, every nation, every tongue, every people group.

"Jesus said that when he was lifted up, he would draw all people to himself.

"All people. Everywhere.

"Everybody's sins on the cross with Jesus."

Bell concludes that "forgiveness is true for everybody."

"And this reality extends beyond this life.

"Heaven is full of forgiven people.

"Hell is full of forgiven people.

"Heaven is full of people God loves, whom Jesus died for.

"Hell is full of forgiven people God loves, whom Jesus died for.

"The difference is how we choose to live, which story we choose to live in, which version of reality we trust.

"Ours or God's."

So, universal salvation is accomplished, the world has been saved. It's only up to us to publish that good news so that the world acknowledges it too.

Mission in solidarity with the world?

It is not a pleasant thing to be obligated publicly to take sharp issue with fellow Christian leaders for placing untoward emphasis on God's love. One risks being regarded as a defender of judgmentalism, of pharisaism, of lack of compassion, and so forth. Undoubtedly the world and the church could use more love.

Still, it is a risk that must be taken in this instance. Though sins of the past, sins of arrogance, of holier-than-thou self-righteousness must be acknowledged, confessed and repented of, I believe that we are in fact seeing a radically different mission strategy unfolding before our eyes today, a strategy, I am convinced, that is tragically doomed to failure.

This mission strategy can fairly be labeled as "solidarity with the world, for the sake of the world." The aim is to stop being judgmental and condemning and by winsome love and identification with the world's brokenness draw it to the Savior. The church must not seek separation from the world but intentionally place itself in the midst of broken and hurting people, identifying with their pain, demonstrating the unconditional love of the Savior. That is the strategy; that is the goal. Solidarity in order to win the world over. Thus, for example, instead of condemning homosexual behavior, we march with AIDS patients showing our solidarity with their plight.

I understand this strategy and feel the pull of its appeal. I too weep weary tears of sadness when I see furious homophobic pamphleteers and picketers at the trial of Matthew Shepherd's murderers boldly proclaiming to the world: "God hates fags!" Indeed, such bigotry has nothing at all to do with the gospel and must be repudiated in the clearest manner possible.

But, when we stop and pause a bit longer, isn't obvious that trying to save the world by joining it won't work? Isn't the Bible clear enough on that point? And isn't the missionary strategy of Scripture a covenantal one that calls us out of the world in order to become the new people of God? God calls Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and promises that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12).

God separates Abraham in order to make a new beginning, to establish a new community, a people of God that were to be holy and walk before him in fear. Yes, Jesus did pray that we would not be isolated from the world; we are to be in it as disciples who are not of it. That means we are not called to identify with the world, to openly declare our solidarity with it, but to call the world to repentance!

Of course, we must do that with bold but still winsome persuasiveness, not with hell-fire and brimstone judgmentalism. At the same time, not to call the world to repentance because we studiously want to avoid sounding judgmental is to abrogate our gospel and missionary obligation altogether. The worst thing about the mission strategy of solidarity with the world to save the world is not that it is doomed to failure, but that it leaves a doomed and damned world to its doom and damnation. That is a judgment the church is in no position to make. That matter is so serious it calls for confession and repentance.

'Reality' parenting?

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

"Come on, get into the game!"
"Run, don't stroll!"
"Move the ball, move the ball!"
"Come on now, pick up the pace!"
"Move it, move it!"
"That's better, now you're getting it!"
"Keep running when kicking the ball!"
"Don't stop!"
"That's better!"

And so it goes … one assertive instruction after another to a mom as she is struggling to play soccer with her child. The "coach" stands on the sideline and knows what she is doing. She has a frown on her forehead, a glint in her eye and hands on her hips. And the mom is listening. Not only that, she is learning. And so, ends another episode of Supernanny, the popular television series that encourages parents to manage their kids more effectively.

Many people obsess over reality television and if comments on the Internet are an indication – Supernanny is a definite hit! Thousands of viewers watch Jo stride into homes across the continent to help parents get a grip on their often unruly, undisciplined and aggressive kids. If you missed an episode there is always the Internet that can keep you informed.

For instance, Counselor Shawn recaps the Orm family whose original air date was sometime last year. He sees Shawna and Tommy Orm as a "very lovely young couple raising three boys. They simply adore their children. Shawn Orm works all day and Tammy is a stay-at-home mom. The three boys are Chandler 8, Caden 6, and Declane 3. Chandler has issues with his emotions, aggression and serious snark towards his mom. Caden doesn't like to eat the meals his mom prepares and insists on having different food. Declane likes to leave the house unannounced and wander alone into busy streets.

The first visit begins with an "observation day" as Jo watches mom and kids interact. She simply observes mom and kids quibble and argue to their hearts content. Eventually, there is an increase in aggression. Dad comes home for lunch to help mom and to get Caden to eat his food. Somewhere along the line Declane leaves the house and Jo just about freaks out. Throughout the day she also observes the children helping themselves to every form of junk food known to human kind in the pantry. To top it off the kids stir the pot with their smart mouths and cheeky attitudes."

It soon becomes evident most of the problems lie with the parents. And so, Supernanny has a meeting with them. She first draws out various positive aspects about their family life. But eventually she addresses what they need to change. Most often the parents are inconsistent with discipline and lack daily routine and structure. She helps them with some communication and disciplining techniques. She also challenges parents to be clearer about where they are coming from in regards to their expectations of themselves as well as each other.

In a nutshell, Supernanny is encouraging parents to be more involved with their children in a firm and structured way. She then leaves the family to attend to its work. After a few days she returns to evaluate what worked and what did not. The parents are challenged to stay on task. Eventually, the kinks are worked out and Jo the Supernanny drives into the sunset.

The television series is timely. Lots of young parents are looking for guidance in rearing their children. Jo makes it look easy. At the same time the series is not without its critics. Much more can be said about the shortcomings of teaching techniques versus encouraging change within the parents themselves. But I believe we need to begin somewhere and Supernanny seems to have the best interest of the children and the parents at heart.

For instance, she's big on helping parents have fun with their children. Not the polite and superficial kind of fun but the spontaneous gut wrenching kind that takes a lot of positive and jovial energy. That is why she's shouting instructions to parents as she is standing on the sideline.

But I think she does not have to shout so loud. I'm hearing her and I'm finally getting it!

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Art

Apologia pro vita cartoona

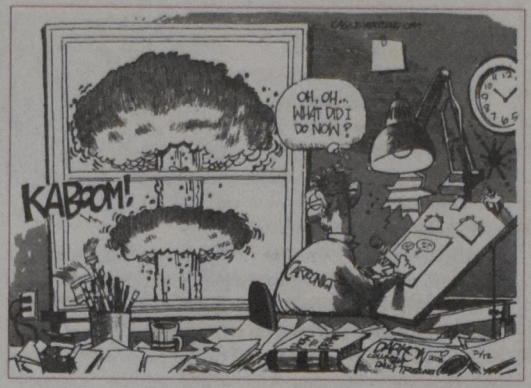
Harry der Nederlanden

The huge flap about the Danish cartoons has engendered some rather inane commentary. Quite a few kind folk, church leaders among them, have rushed to pacify the angry, to apologize to those who took offense, and even to call for an end to cartoons that provoke, stereotype and transgress against what others hold sacred.

It's understandable. If we put in the weigh scales a few mediocre cartoons on the one side and on the other destroyed property and human lives, to say nothing of the cost to Denmark's economy, prudence would dictate a ban on such drawings in the future.

But it isn't that easy to isolate cartoons from other forms of representation and expression, whether in the pictorial arts or in literature. The kind of caricaturing that comes to its most basic (and sometimes most base) expression in political and social cartoons is not unique to that art. It is a component, an important component, of the way the Western mind and imagination works. It is an acquired and learned art, and we should not be so quick to surrender it.

Let's be realistic. Even if we imposed on our cartoonists prohibitions against offending anyone's sense of the sacred, that prohibition would be unenforceable in other areas of expression. So I want to defend the legitimacy of the cartooning life – and, in view of the fatwa issued against the Danish cartoonists, also to come to the defence of the cartoonists' lives. An apologia for cartoonists. They perform a critical office in our culture, one worth defending.



Editorial or political cartooning blends in our minds with those other amusements also referred to as cartoons – visual gags, funnies, caricatures, comic strips, comic books and animated films. We don't usually rank them with such arts as music, painting, poetry and fiction. But Porky Pig and Donald Duck have little to do with the kind of cartooning that takes aim (often wicked aim) at the contradictions and hypocrisies of contemporary life, most often at the follies of the rich and powerful.

But there is something very basic, even primordial, about the primitive drawings that appear on the editorial pages of our newspapers. Although some cartoonists have developed cartooning into a sophisticated art, they retain a certain primal simplicity. The earliest drawings we make as children resemble cartoons. As I grew up, one of my favorite pastimes was copying cartoon characters, and the edges of my notebooks are to this day marred by funny faces displaying all kinds of emotions.

There's a certain magic about them. A few lines, a few shapes, and – presto! – a few scribbles have captured something about humanity on the page before you. Cartoons imitate to some extent, but they mostly simplify, distort and exaggerate. They often bear only a minimal likeness to anything we see in reality, just enough to suit the cartoonist's purpose.

In many ways, they develop a vocabulary of their own. The squiggles we put on paper to write the word "cat" don't resemble a cat at all, but they evoke catness in our minds. Mickey Mouse bears only a faint resemblance to a real mouse, walking upright, blinking his huge eyes and talking, but we recognize the icon for mouse.

Cartoons speak a language all their own, a language we have all learned. Editorial and political cartoons have taken that basic language and turned it into a unique art. A minor art, but an art nevertheless. An art that can be abused, and often is, but an art worth defending.

And it is an art that needs defending, not just from the imams and the mullahs, or from the priests and pastors, but from a society whose highest value is quickly becoming tolerance. I'm not talking about genuine tolerance, mind you, but about a repressive tolerance. It begins by saying, "Let's not needlessly offend one another by talking about our differences. After all, it's the politically correct, the polite thing, not to target icons and values that are dear to others." It ends up erecting fences around large areas of discourse and putting them off-limits. Those off-limit areas contain precisely the things that matter most, the things that different groups hold sacred.

An essay in defense of cartoonists sent out recently by Cagle Cartoons, an online service to which *CC* subscribes, laments the disappearance of most editorial cartoonist positions at American dailies. It's part of down-sizing and consolidation. But it's also because the corporations are afraid of offending readers and losing advertising revenue. I suspect that offended Christians have been responsible for the termination of more cartoonists than angry Muslims.

The Cagle essay whines that most cartoons are perfectly innocent and inoffensive; they insult no one, intend no irreverence but only want to put a smile on our faces. That so-called "defence" offends me. The best of the editorial cartoons are a sharp sword that cuts to the heart of the matter. They skewer pretensions. They mock what we hold sacrosanct. They are iconoclastic: they smash idols.

They are a pictorial form of satire, and satire is seldom gentle or kind. Or rather, I should say, satire is cruel in order to be kind. This is not to deny that many cartoonists lose sight of the ultimate goal of doing good by pricking us and just indulge in pricking for its own sake. We used to say that sometimes the truth hurts. But our public ethos is fast becoming: "Never give offence." In fact, that's what some of our clerics have boiled the gospel down to, forgetting that God is the first iconoclast and that Jesus calls himself a stumbling block.

In the mainline churches many clerics seem to defend an order like the one that prevailed in the days of the Roman Empire, when every god was simply added to the great pantheon of gods. Why were Christians targeted in those days? Because they were blasphemers. They offended the religious sensibilities of others by scoffing at gods made of wood and stone and by declaring that there was only one God and that the way to him was by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Bible opens with an iconoclastic poem: the creation account declares that the sun, moon and stars are not gods, as the pagans believed, but that they are merely things, part of God's creation. When God launches the history of redemption with the first Israelite, Abraham leaves behind the gods of his tribe and follows the true God.

Iconoclasm and conversion are closely related. Again and again the people of God fall under the thrall of idols, and God corrects his people, not always gently, toppling the idols and calling his peole to do a radical about-face. The Ten Commandments are, among other things, a skewer: they hold up before us a mirror of ten negative examples and declare them to be folly equal to worshiping wood and stone.

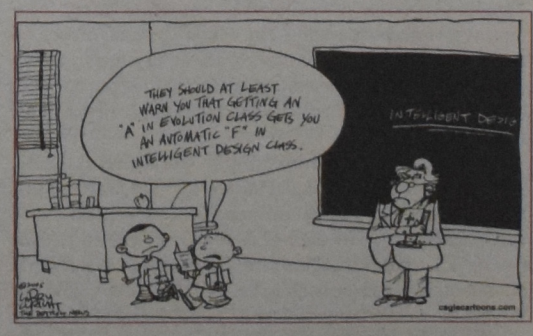
This iconoclastic motive weaves itself into the warp and woof of the Christian mind and imagination, and beyond – into the very fabric of Western culture. We have grown a self-reflective, ironic culture that is constantly assessing the authenticity and legitimacy of those things we raise up as ultimate and inviolable.

When Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, aware that he was depicting his own life as an example, he kept interspersing prayers asking God for humility, and he was careful to tell it not as an ever-ascending ladder but as a journey of stops and starts, interspersed with sin and folly.

While the great stories about origins in other cultures tend to hold high the gods, demi-gods and heroes of their founding, Christianity has given birth to a narrative tradition, now secularized, that turned away from stories of demi-gods, kings and heroes to eventually write about traveling sales-

Not just mullahs, but politicians too, would like to do away with cartoonists. The Cheney shooting accident was irresistible to cartoonists.

An important question: if you yank the pillar for one group, will it hold for others?


THEY SHOULD AT LEAST WARN YOU THAT GETTING AN "A" IN EVOLUTION CLASS GETS YOU AN AUTOMATIC "F" IN INTELLIGENT DESIGN CLASS.
INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Cartoons are seldom subtle. They oversimplify to make a point – here about inner tensions in public education.

men, ordinary men and women struggling to make sense of their lives. The way to this celebration of the ordinary led through the subversion of the high and lofty.

I could cite numerous examples, but last year was the 400th anniversary of that great proto-novel *Don Quixote*. It was begun as satire, mocking the stories that held up to the common people the ideal of knighthood. The knight was the defender of all that is noble and gracious, all the virtues, that is, of the court; he sallied forth into the world on his high quest, challenging the monsters that terrorize the villages and rescuing innocent maidens from their clutches.

Cervantes set out to ridicule that unrealistic ideal, so badly out of touch with the lives of ordinary folk, but he discovered something enduring in the ideal, and his satire turned into comedy.

Preceding Cervantes, one of the first narrative poems of the English language and still the greatest, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* has a backbone constructed of satire. As the pilgrims travel toward the goal of their religious pilgrimage, they each tell stories that seek to inflate their own station but that expose their selfish motives.

This exemplifies the back-and-forth shuttle of the Christian imagination: we seek to make the works of our minds and hands into part of God's Kingdom, so that its substance participates in the divine order of things. In the political theology of the Renaissance, for example, theologians described the monarch as a christomimetis, a copy of the Lord on earth. The king was supposed to be the very embodiment of justice, biblical justice. But one of the most prominent story patterns of the time followed that of the wheel of fortune, in which the wheel turns to lift the king up to his height of prominence only to bring him down.

When we think the great things we have established are sacred and permanent, they have turned into false gods, and in the end they will disappoint us and come tumbling down.

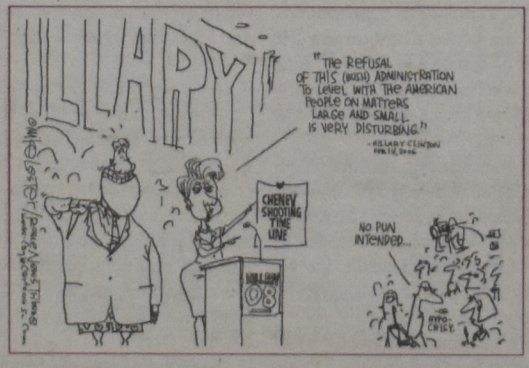
Cartoonists and satirists draw on this precious motive that is indispensable to critical, iconoclastic reason and imagination. It is true that it often runs amok, seeking to topple all values and all gods. But without it, we wouldn't have had the Reformation, which punctured the pretensions of the Church of Rome. Nor would we have the experimental sciences, which shattered the notion of the heavens as a perfect order with perfectly round orbits for the planets.

Recently Thomas Cahill wrote a book entitled *How the Irish saved civilization*. I don't want to make a similar claim for the cartoonists and the satirists. That would make a caricature of my own argument. It would have to have a different title: *How the cartoonists punctured civilization in order to save it.*

If we are to be rescued from our own sanctimoniousness, we are in need of those nasty but courageous individuals willing to expose our folly and get us to laugh at ourselves. To make that possible, we have to allow quite a bit of latitude, for sometimes those mockers will target something that really is sacred – or at least, something we take to be sacred.

FREE TO BLOW UP SHIITE MOSQUES
FREE TO ASSASSINATE SUNNI CLERICS
FREE TO MURDER INNOCENT CIVILIANS
FREEDOM IS ON THE MARCH!

Yes, questions about the march of freedom have been raised in print, but a picture drives it home much more vividly.


ILLIARY!
"THE REFUSAL OF THIS (BUSH) ADMINISTRATION TO LEVEL WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ON MATTERS, LARGE AND SMALL, IS VERY DISTURBING."
CHENEY SHOOTING TIME LINE
NO PUN INTENDED...

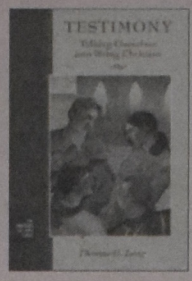
The favorite pastime of cartoonists: exposing the hypocrisy of the powerful.

I DUNNO... I'M KINDA CONFUSED MYSELF. BUT IT CAN BEST BE EXPLAINED SCIENTIFICALLY... THE BABY IN THE MANGER IS THE SON OF THE INTELLIGENT DESIGNER...

Some Christians may find this cartoon offensive, but it points to the difference between the language of science and of religion.

Speaking the whole truth

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian by Thomas G. Long (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004)

Several times in his book, Thomas Long quotes Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Workers Movement, who said, "If I have achieved anything in my life, it is because I have not been embarrassed to talk about God." Long wants to help Christians talk with integrity about God, not only when they are in church, but throughout their daily lives.

However, Long's book is not about evangelism techniques. Though he admits there is room for books on that theme, he points out that "sometimes the underlying assumption of such books is that the only reason why a Christian would want to speak publicly about faith is to convert other people." He claims that there is a more profound reason why Christians share their faith, namely "because it is a truly human act to want to tell the truth." He adds that Christians cannot speak the whole truth without talking about God, and "if we cannot tell the whole truth, we cannot be wholly alive as human beings."

As Christians share their faith with others, something also happens in their own spiritual lives. Long explains, "When we talk about our faith . . . we are coming more fully and clearly to believe. In short, we are always talking ourselves into being Christian."

In North American culture, there is a "famine of authentic speech about God." How can Christians address that famine? To answer that question, Long looks to the early church. At that time, Christians were called followers of the Way or the Road. Those names had implications then, and do so now, for how Christians speak the whole truth in society. In Romans 10:15 Paul quoted Isaiah when speaking of people who spread the gospel: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." Long concludes that the focus is on the feet – not on the words, the faces, the mouths, or the stained glass windows of those who bring good news – because "before we can open our mouths to speak some good news from God, we usually have to burn a little shoe leather to journey to the people who need to hear these words of comfort." The Way is not just a set of beliefs, but a way of life which reflects the love of Christ and ultimately uses words in the way God intends them to be used.

New Testament Christians knew that it was essential to put their faith into words – to give testimony and to bear witness. Long asserts that in Christian circles today the words "testimony" and "witness" have "fallen into corrupt uses." Through "big words" used in law courts, their scope has been limited to an autobiographical sketch of how a person came to know Christ. Long shows that the meanings of the words encompass infinitely more. Through the way Christians live their entire lives, they are on the witness stand corroborating the testimony of Jesus, the true and faithful witness.

Even though Christians are called to be witnesses, they aren't born knowing how to talk about their faith. They need to learn how. One of the places in which they learn to do so is during worship at church, which Long calls the "language school" of God. He adds that worship "forms a kind of dress rehearsal for the drama of the Monday-to Saturday world." He explores how the prayers, hymns, and sermons that Christians participate in "anticipate and shape what we say and do in the rest of life." Christians' witness of awe and thanksgiving, of sin and forgiveness, and of human worth and work explored in worship carry over into expressions of faith outside of worship.

Employing the structure of a normal day as a metaphor – first light, working hours, lunch time, the six o'clock news, and bed time – Long shows how Christians need to be out in the world talking as God talks, which is the essence of testimony. He writes, "Whenever we use our words to join in the activity of God in the world – to form community, to heal, to forgive, to set things right – we are bearing faithful witness to God."

The most profound insight that Long left this reader with is that "Christians tell the truth in order to increase the love of God and the love of neighbor. . . They are the yardsticks by which Christian testimony is measured."

Long's thought-provoking book is especially enjoyable to read because he illustrates his points with many meaningful anecdotes. All Christians seeking to live an increasingly authentic witness for Christ will benefit from reading it. Worship directors, members of worship committees, and pastors will especially benefit from the chapter entitled "Sunday Words."

Ecclesiastes

There is no wisdom without suffering

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

Ecclesiastes 7:4

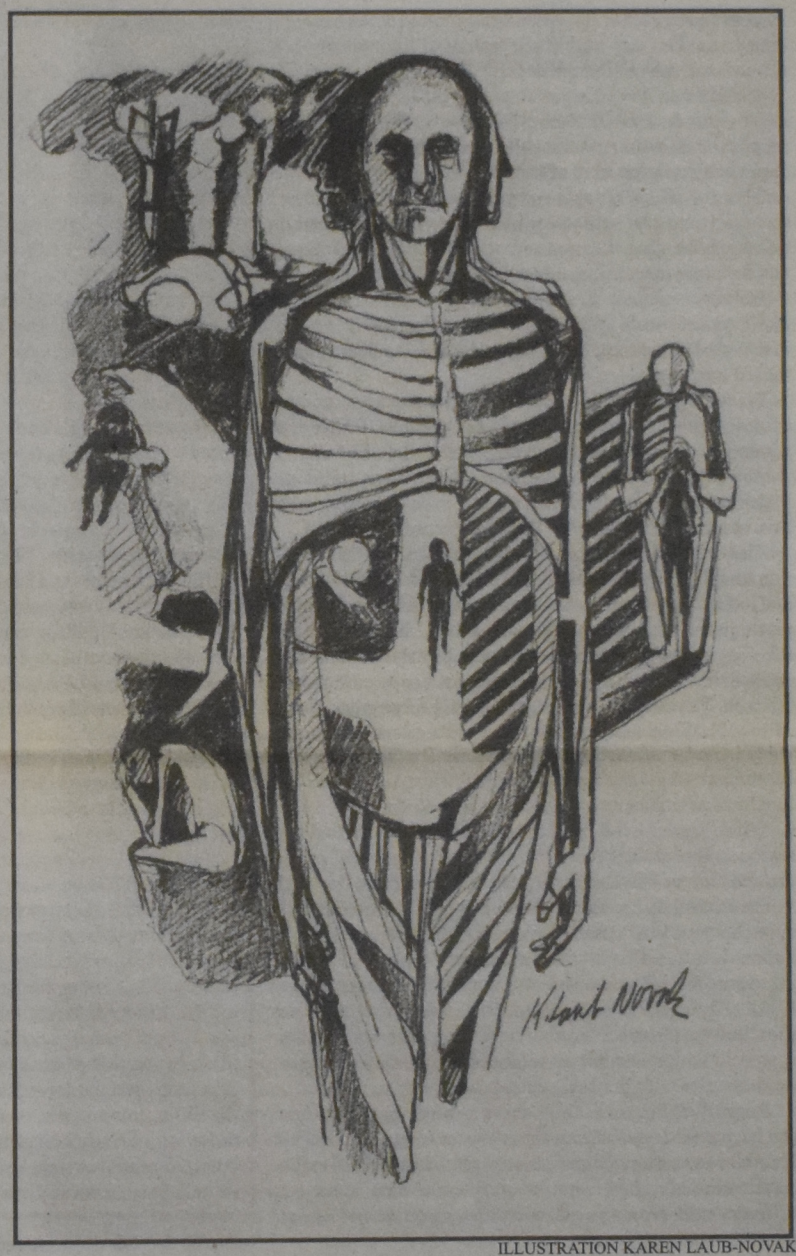


ILLUSTRATION KAREN LAUB-NOVAK

A.A. van Ruler

There are two things we should keep in mind in reading this text. First, that the Preacher does not want us to absolutize this saying. In verse 12 of the previous chapter he explicitly said that man cannot know what is the highest good for himself. In this chapter, however, he seems to presuppose that man can know that one thing is better than another: that the day of death better than the day of birth, and that it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting.

It is a comparative knowledge. We must not rate death above life in an absolute sense, nor mourning above feasting. An absolute pessimist presumes to know absolutely what is good – nothingness, for example. But the Preacher is aware that as a human being he must be on guard against such absolute positions.

In the second place, we must also remember that the Preacher does not mean to say that death in itself is preferable to life and that therefore we should mourn a birth and celebrate a death. He is not here dealing with life and death, mourning and feasting in and of themselves, but with what living human beings can learn from such experiences. A good name is better than fine perfume, he says. Similarly, although life, birth and feasting are good, death and mourning are better. We learn much more from these experiences.

At least, this is how the wise see and experience things. But most of us are not wise, but fools. We flee death, mourning and suffering. We think they are purely evil. We focus only on life, birth, feasting. These are the things we seek after, going from one party to another.

This is a consuming quest. It is also a flight, a flight from suffering and death. We are driven by enormous fear. Fleeing from death, we desperately pursue life. This, we think, will give us pleasure. In the meantime, however, we are actually consumed by fear and anxiety.

Those who are wise are aware of this: they see the lust for life as a fear of death. This isn't all, to be sure. He doesn't just see the negative; he also discovers something positive. He discovers that death is the destiny of each and every person, and that the living – if they are to live a complete and authentic life – should take that to heart (7:2).

We must take the entirety of life into account, including death. We not only have a beginning, but also an end. The end is part of life. It is part of wisdom to realize this and thus to come to greater completeness and in this way to greater perfection as well.

But there is something deeper behind all this. It is not just a matter of taking everything into account. Sorrow is better than laughter, says the Preacher, because a sad face is good for the heart (7:3). Death, mourning and suffering lead us to the actual depth of human life. They make it a serious matter. That's where life gets refined. We arrive at a right relationships to things, because we penetrate to their essence.

We see that they are all creatures of God. We also see that God's judgment is woven through them. We acknowledge our creatureliness and thus enter into a relationship with God. This is the heart of the matter – to penetrate through the self and through being and through things until we bump into God, and into his majesty and power. This is serious, but it is more than that – it is also an immeasurable joy.

But the heart of the matter is not on the surface. Fools stay on the surface. They only look at the outer appearance of things. They think that only what is pleasurable brings joy. So they seek the substance of life in making merry.

It is astonishing at the number of people who spend their entire lives pursuing this illusion. They endlessly chase after sensation, power, wealth, amusement. But don't we all participate in this chase to some extent? However, we must not think that all those people who are so intent on living life to the full are truly happy. We know better, often from our own experience.

Do you think that anyone is actually happy in his foolishness? Doesn't everyone on some level realize that his foolishness is indeed foolishness? Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools (7:6): it makes a surprising amount of noise but it produces very little heat, for it is quickly consumed.

No, foolishness is no more than foolishness, but it exerts a tremendous attraction in our lives. So when someone actually gains wisdom, this is a tremendous achievement. His heart is in the house of mourning. He does not go out of his way to avoid it. It no longer fills him with inner dread. He is ready to enter. Perhaps we might even say that he looks forward to it.

The house of mourning, of course, includes a great deal. First, it includes the reality of death and mourning. Those who are wise no longer seek to avoid it, just as Jesus did not seek to avoid death. He accepted death and he did so willingly. He himself laid down his life for us.

But the house of mourning includes sorrow and suffering, pain and sadness. Those who are wise are also ready to enter into this house. In fact, this is where they come to themselves, for they know that this is where they encounter the depth of things, the meaning of existence, this is where they find truth and love, this is where they meet God.

Is it really true that sorrow and suffering make us wise? Or is it the other way around: that we must first be wise to discover a blessing in sorrow and suffering?

I think we must speak of a back and forth relationship here. Without sorrow and suffering it would be hard to become wise. But they don't automatically make a person wise. Suffering can also stultify and stupify. Some discover nothing in it; they only come to curse God.

To be saved from this outcome, we must find our wisdom elsewhere – in the Gospel. But this Gospel wisdom is further trained, confirmed and deepened by our experience of the depths of life.

In any case, wisdom wherever it is found, enters into the house of mourning. Wisdom even gives it precedence over the house of feasting.

But then we must not forget that it also transforms the house of mourning into the house of joy. It does not remain stuck in mourning and suffering and death. This is where it finds the depth of existence, God's blessing, eternal life. Wisdom is *memento mori* – remember your death. But if we do so wisely, then we may go on to another saying: *carpe diem* – seize the day. According to the Bible, the latter is the biblical blessing of God on our *memento mori*.

Nurses, bedpans and X-rated hospital gowns

James L. Snyder

Tuesday last I awoke from my nightly slumber with terrific pain in my chest, much like an elephant break-dancing on my chest. It was painful just to breathe, but like the trooper I am, I shrugged it off and set about my daily routine. Rather than improving, the pain intensified.

I went to my office and started the day's work only to find it almost impossible. Fortunately, my one daughter is a paramedic with the fire department and the other is an EMT with the county ambulance service. Sitting at my desk, I saw the vehicles pull into the church office parking lot.

Within a few minutes, my office was filled with EMTs and paramedics. (Someone and I'll mention no name, only to say this person who lives at the same address as I, squealed on me.) Their unified mission was convincing a rather stubborn preacher to go to the hospital. According to their examination, it was possible I was having a heart attack.

Who knew I even had a heart?

Each took turns persuading me that I needed to go to the hospital. Their strategy was to wear me down. To my credit, it took half a dozen to do the job. The ambulance was outside and in a few minutes, so they assured me, they could have me in the emergency room.

"What about it, Reverend," a good-looking paramedic said, "how about going to the hospital?"

"Okay," I finally agreed, "but I'm not going in the ambulance, I've already mortgaged my house."

I was escorted to my paramedic daughter's jeep and away we went to the ER.

When we arrived at the hospital, they rushed me into the emergency room and started working on me.

After a few hours, I came to myself (which is a shock in and of itself) and discovered my chest had been shaven. Now, what I need to know is, once shaved always shaved? Just a theological ruse.

In examining my chest, I discovered I had 17 nipples of which all but two were hooked up to some monitoring system. When a person, such as I, is in a dazed confused condition, this is enough to create a heart attack.

The medical staff put me through all the tests they had in their diagnostic arsenal. Evidently I had crammed the night before because I passed all the their tests with flying colors. Although I passed the tests the pain in my chest continued.

During my medical odyssey, I discovered three things.

The first has to do with nurses, which are the first line of defense in a medical situation. Sometimes – and I'm not complaining, just grateful and they are the only lines of defense. Certainly, they are the link to everything a person needs.

It is extremely important to keep on good terms with these angels of mercy. For one, they are the ones who wield the needles in the ER.

Nurses have two kinds of needles. One, they have the nice sharp pointy needles that pierce the epidermis with the greatest of ease causing the least amount of discomfort.

The second type is reserved for those certain patients, and you know who you are, that cross them. I'm referring to the square point needles that gouge the flesh. I'm proud to say I experienced the former.

The second has to do with hospital bedpans. What deranged person masterminded this dysfunctional appliance? Some research must be funded by the government to track this person or persons down and have them executed.

Normally I'm not a violent man. My philosophy is "live and let live." However, hospital bedpans are not normal and are deliberately designed to malfunction every time. Don't ask me how I know, I just do. If not executed, then they should be confined to a hospital bed for the rest of their life and I have just the bedpan for them.

The third thing I discovered in the hospital has to do with those x-rated hospital gowns. They come in one-size-fits-all. That's all right if you happen to be 3'6".

Unless a person is dyslexic, it takes no rocket scientist to see I am a bit larger than 3'6". I just happen to be 6'3" and have never been mistaken for a midget. I have no idea what these so-called gowns were designed for but it was not for modesty.

In fact, there is some evidence that patients in the psychiatric ward of the hospital designed the hospital gown as a group therapy project. It has absolutely no practical – or impractical for that matter – purpose in this life. The hospital gown could be classified as the cross-purpose-driven garment.

Several days have passed since leaving my hospital oasis, giving me some time for reflection. The hardest thing for a person like me is to wait. I have my agenda and I dare the person to stand in my way.

God, however, has devised marvelous ways of incorporating into our daily regime opportunities to practice this illusive virtue.

A passage from the Psalms keeps running through the back of my mind. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah." (Psalms 62:5-8 KJV.)

Nurses, bedpans and X-rated hospital gowns are not the real issues of a hospital stay. Trusting God in adversity is the most important.

James L. Snyder is a pastor of a church in Ocala, Fl.

The faith of a child

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

My mother turned eighty-two last week. My brother Jim, Jack and I visited her on the actual date. Then on the weekend I invited my mother-in-law and my children to join me for a "porta-party." I baked a chocolate cake, and took along ice cream, pop and disposable dishes. The plan was to meet together in church and from there head off to the nursing home where Ma lives. Because we all came from different directions, the VanderSlikkes ended up arriving at church in four (count 'em!) Volkswagens.

Six adults won't fit into a single Jetta, even if we are a close-knit family. So we reduced the fleet to two cars. On the way home Stephanie took Grandma and Willene in her VW. I drove Grandma's gleaming white Jetta, while Jess kept me company and James slept in the backseat. I thought of the many miles we covered in our old Ford Econoline when the kids were little. In those days James often slept when we traveled (although he takes up a lot more space now). But I remember one time when he was wide awake....

Big, wet snowflakes splattered against the windshield that evening as the murky daylight waned. Jack gripped the steering wheel tightly, doing his best to hold our big van steady against the strong winds. I looked over my shoulder at our three children. Baby Jessica squirmed in her car seat. She squawked restlessly, trying to get comfortable enough to fall asleep. Our five-year-old twins sat on either side of their little sister, wide-eyed and white faced.

"Quite the storm we're driving into," mumbled Jack, as he switched the wipers onto high.

"There was nothing like this in the forecast," I replied. "I'll be glad when we finally get home."

A trembling voice came from the backseat, "Do you think we'll make it, Dad?"

"Sure we will, James. Just relax," said Jack. The back end of the van fish-tailed as we stopped for an intersection. "It's all under control, son."

The wind whipped snow in sheets across the open fields and polished the road's surface. We made our way up the Niagara Escarpment, and the van started to sputter and jerk. Jack and I exchanged nervous glances.

"In the Bible Jesus calmed the storm," Stephanie piped up.

"Maybe we should pray." James nodded enthusiastically.

"Good idea," said Jack, "Just do it quietly, okay?"

In spite of the dismal situation, I had to smile when I peeked again at my children – a couple of earnest cherubim, chubby fingers intertwined in prayer, eyes tightly shut. Stephanie's face was serene in the dim light from the dashboard. James moved his lips to form words only he and his Maker could hear. Jessica's head bobbed gently, her heavy eyelids closed at last.

We chugged and lurched onward. At the top of the hill a gust of wind caught the van and we slid onto the shoulder of the road. Jack braked gently, then maneuvered back onto the pavement.

"I told Jesus the engine was acting up," said James. "It feels better now, doesn't it?"

He was right. Although the wind still played havoc with the vehicle, the engine no longer threatened to quit. However, icy rain now mixed with the snow, glazed over the windshield faster than the wipers could clear it. Jack pulled off the road and grabbed a scraper. With the window clean we pulled back into the creep and crawl traffic.

A few miles later James asked, "Do you think God heard us, Mom?"

"Sure he did," I said, "But remember that even if God doesn't settle the storm down, he's still with us on our way home and wherever we go."

The look on my young son's face told me he wasn't so sure. Before long he cleared his throat and speaking confidently, began a new prayer. "Okay, Jesus, I just thought I'd ask you one more time if you could shut off the storm. It's kind of scary and I think my mom is worried. Thank you, Lord. Amen." With that he folded his arms across his chest and gazed expectantly out the window.

Eventually the snow let up and the freezing rain subsided. The wind continued to pummel our van all the way home, but visibility was clear and no more snow drifted across the highway. As I tucked my children into their beds that night, we gave thanks to God for hearing our prayers and bringing us safely home.

Twenty years later it might be tempting to explain the whole episode away "logically." But I'm inclined to take a lesson from the faith of a child. Just bring life's storms to God and trust him to take care of it. Does it really need to be more difficult than that?

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@ hotmail.com

Environment

Evangelicals and the politics of Climate Change

Peter C Glover

Apocalyptic visions of a despoiled planet. The collapse of the Gulf Stream. The Greenland ice sheet melting. Floods. Billions dead. And the author of this coming global mayhem? Mankind – me and you. That is, according to the prophetic Climate Change lobbies.

But if we look closely we should too be able to perceive some familiar themes – familiar that is to Christians – in the related religious imagery and language of the Climate Change movement. Apocalyptic language. Biblical-scale destruction. Salvation. A strong sense of purpose and mission. And the urgent need to proselytise and its corollary of winning people to the cause: conversion. And with it the irrepressible urge that infects all immature religious fervor, the urge to brook no dissent.

But what about the real science? As Christians it behoves us to pursue truth – and not just the media handouts and vox pops perception of it.

It often seems the only thing that the Climate Change doom-sayers can say with any degree of certainty is: unless man changes his ways, climate change will destroy man. But the very first thing that becomes evident concerning the science of Climatology itself is that it is incredibly complex, riddled with unknowns and replete with variant factors that make the entire project a thorough-going guessing game.

Clouding the issue

Take just one critical issue: clouds. Dr Robert C Balling Jr. Director of the Office of Climatology, Arizona University explains, "Clouds remain the greatest mystery in the global warming debate. If our future has more high clouds, any greenhouse warming will be amplified, but if our future has more low clouds, their ability to reflect away solar radiation will dampen any warming.... Clouds are widely recognized to be the wild cards in the greenhouse debate, and at present, *clouds are notoriously poorly represented in numerical models of climate*." (italics mine)

Even leading greenhouse scientist James Hansen has written, "The forces that drive long term climate change are not known with an accuracy sufficient to define climate changes."

Dr Balling again, "The global warming scientific debate seems at times to be a squabble regarding how quickly the Earth is warming (or if it is warming at all), where the warming is occurring, the time of year of the warming, whether the warming is good or bad, or most importantly, whether policy actions would have any impact ... year after year, scientists make discoveries that further complicate predicting climate into the future.... Anyone claiming to know where we are headed climatically, with or without policy actions, is disregarding the complexities in predicting the future climate of the Earth."

THIS IS EXACTLY HOW I PICTURED THE GREENGREEN, THE OPPRESSIVE HEAT, THE WILTING GRASSLANDS... LOOK! VULTURES ARE CIRCLING A DYING ANIMAL!
TOO BAD WE'RE STILL IN OHIO

Hyping the truth

So what about the threat to the Gulf Stream that we keep hearing about? And the Greenland ice sheet? Professor Carl Wunsch of the Massachusetts Institute Technology, in a letter to *Nature* magazine (April 8, 2005), takes up these issues: "Real questions exist about conceivable changes in the ocean circulation and its climate consequences. However, such discussion is not helped by hyperbole and alarmism. The occurrence of a climate state without the Gulf Stream any time soon – within tens of millions of years – has a probability of little more than zero.

He adds, "The only way to produce an ocean circulation without a Gulf Stream is either to turn off the wind system, or to stop the Earth's rotation, or both." And concludes, "reality is simply far too complex even considering modelling extremes as legitimate climate predictions. The available climatic data for Greenland and over the North Atlantic simply do not give us confidence in the currently available modelled scenarios of Greenland."

Dr Robert E Davis, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, University of Virginia has some highly relevant things to say about natural climate cycles (largely denied and ignored by environmentalists). "In reality...we have a tragically short record of good observations." He continues, "With phenomenal accuracy afforded by hindsight, we know that, sometime around 1977-8, our planet underwent an abrupt shift from one climatic state (generally cold) to another (warm). Of course, this climate shift was retrospectively blamed on increasing greenhouse gases, because such dramatic and abrupt shifts couldn't be natural. Presumably Nature, left to her own devices, does not cotton to wild mood swings."

His implication being that Nature does naturally warm and cool our climate in cycles.

Davies' conclusion is telling, "The biggest problem with all of these somewhat cyclical climate shifts is that no one knows for sure that a shift has taken place until many years *after* the event, when its too late to be useful. So be wary of global warming psychics warning us of unprecedented climate shifts – in most cases, they are only unprecedented because of the short life span of most scientists. Remember one of the absolutely fundamental and too-often unstated tenets of science – there's little point in studying anything that doesn't vary during a scientists lifetime."

In short no climatologist, environmentalist, scientist, nor green prophet of any hue can predict future climate change with any degree of accuracy. If that is so then where does all this future cataclysmic certainty come from?

Tom Bethell, in his excellent book *The Politically-Incorrect Guide to Science* (Regnery) suggests that a major part of the problem is that modern science research too often becomes the "handmaiden of politics." As he points out, while news journalists are more than prepared to question the words and actions of leading politicians, they feel themselves entirely out of their depth doing so with leading scientists.

Bethell notes how in the USA, "The budget of the National Institute of Health in the USA has doubled under President Bush." Indeed, the existence of countless science research laboratories depend directly on pursuing research on the latest global scare in most Western nations – and stepping out of line can mean losing funds.

Dr Roy Spencer, Principal Research Scientist at the University of Alabama in Hunstville and a former NASA scientist himself, forcefully makes the point. "(The US) government heavily funds a marching army of climate scientists – government, university and private – whose funding depends upon manmade global warming remaining a threat. The government agencies, like NASA, that the money flows through, also depend upon these issues remaining alive for continued funding.

This is not to suggest that there is a conspiracy going on. It's merely to point out that climate scientists aren't always unbiased keepers of the truth. The arena of global warming overflows with more strongly held opinions than it does unbiased or scientific truths." So we see how easy it becomes to have a vested interest in global scare scenarios – and how a climate of fear can so easily create a fear of climate.

Enter *The Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI): Climate Change a Call to Action* launched in February 2006, a document signed by 89 evangelical leaders in the USA. The ECI paper makes four claims before coming to a conclusion which calls evangelicals to "joint action" based upon the claims. Within days a senior fellow at the US Competitive Enterprise Institute, Iain Murray, published a response in the *National Review Online* entitled "Beware False Prophets: On the dangers of ignoring the harmful effects of reducing carbon emissions."

The paper dealt with each of the four claims from ECInitative document in turn – reducing them to 'scientific' ashes. The opening claim of the evangelical paper is that "Human-induced Climate Change is Real." Here is Ian Murray's assessment: "This is true as a simple statement, but the evidence the group proposes for it is weak and its meaning far from clear ... the group claims that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has 'documented the steady rise in global temperatures over the last fifty years.' This is not the case. The earth actually cooled between 1942 and 1980. The earth has warmed steadily over the last 25 years and the evidence from satellites is not consistent with the idea that global warming is actually global."

Murray, revealing the relevant data, goes on to point out how the ECI "says that the IPCC projects that the global temperature will continue to rise. This is true, but the wording is important. A projection is not a prediction. The IPCC has found itself unable to predict with any degree of confidence what will happen to global temperatures in the future."

He further reveals how the ECI document claims the IPCC has "attributed most of the warming to human activities." In fact, what the IPCC actually said was it was "likely to have been mostly due to greenhouse gases" but added a caveat that they could not be sure. As Murray says, evidence since tends

See ***Evangelicals*** *... page 18*

A note to skeptics

I published this story with more than a few reservations. I have no doubt that scientists are in general agreed that there is a warming trend in recent years and that manmade pollution has played a role in that.

But Glover makes the point that there is no sure way of knowing how much of this is due to natural warming cycles. In the '70s scientists worried about global cooling due to pollutants blocking sunlight. His warning that science (and human reason) is unable to oversee and grasp all the factors that go into global events is worth noting.

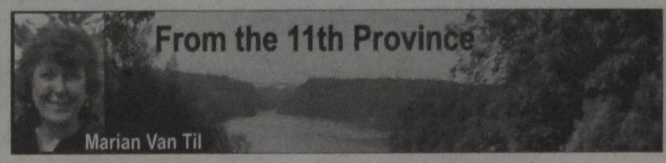
But the most interesting part of his article is, I think, where he draws attention to the fact that the global-warming narrative is taking on a kind of religious status that is displacing the eschatology of the biblical story.

Or can it be seen to blend with the biblical story – in terms of a judgment brought on ourselves?

Glover is not suggesting that Christians should be indifferent to pollution and other environmental issues – just that they must be seen as part of a larger story and be balanced by other concerns.

The editor

Reflections



Gimme that ol' time religion

I grew up in Highland, Indiana, then a town of perhaps 20,000 people. Highland is in the northwest corner of Indiana, next door to Gary (the latter made famous by *The Music Man*, and later infamous for a whole lot of other reasons, not the least of which was as the hometown of Michael Jackson). Indiana borders Illinois, as I'm sure all of you Canadian readers know, because Canadians are supposed to be good at geography. So Highland (and Gary) was, even then before urban sprawl, really a suburb of Chicago, Illinois.

The heart of that great "Second City" is a mere 25 miles from Highland. (Chicago was called the Second City, and gave its name to a native comedy troupe that later moved to TV and starred a lot of Canadians, because it was then the second largest city in the U.S. I bet not all of you knew *that*.) Despite lying on the doorstep of that huge, bustling, decadent city (aren't all big cities bustling and decadent?), Highland was a rather conservative place. It still is, in its way.

As I reached adulthood, traveled around the U.S. encountering Christian Reformed churches, visited relatives and friends in Grand Rapids, Michigan (headquarters of the CRC), and then moved into a CRC community in Canada in January 1975, I discovered that Highland, Indiana's reputation for conservatism had preceded it in the minds of many; especially Canadians. Back in the '70s and '80s when Canadians would ask where I was from (detecting an accent they knew was American), I would meet shaking heads or arched eyebrows, or every now and then would hear, "I bet you're glad you're out of *there*, eh?" It was enough to cause a complex about being from Highland, Indiana, CONSERVATIVE CAPITAL OF THE CRC in NORTH AMERICA! My fate was, apparently, even worse than being from Lethbridge, Alberta, and possibly roughly equivalent, in those days, to being from Dundas, Ontario. But *was* it?

Who's in First?

There are two Christian Reformed congregations in Highland, Indiana: they are still called, in what was once typically CRC fashion, First Church and Second Church. (I've always wondered about that CRC penchant for numbering rather than naming congregations. It's certainly unimaginative, and doesn't seem justifiable on biblical grounds.) At any rate, Second Church was inaugurated during my childhood and was considered the more "progressive" of the two.

Though even as a child I remember longing for something new (there was just one minister at First Church from the time I was four years old until I was in college), my parents stuck with First Church when Second Church came along.

As I think of it now, I realize I don't know their reasons for that. My father was not keen on Rev. So-and-So; but nor was my dad someone to justify church-hopping because of a less than inspiring minister. (I say "minister" rather than "pastor" because I never in all those years experienced him as the latter. He was a remote figure. As a young child I was fascinated by his formal attire in the pulpit – clothing I had, at that time, seen nowhere else, and which included a high-collared shirt, cravat, striped trousers, coat with tails and meticulously polished shoes; black, of course.)

Sermon diversion

There were, however, good things about First Church. One of them was the music. There was no choir (not even on days like Christmas and Easter) but there was a pipe organ, and, mostly, good organists. And I *loved* it. (I joined the ranks of those organists in 8th grade, and loved that even more.)

I recall the excitement I felt, when I was learning to read, at being able to begin to follow along with the texts of the songs in the (blue) *Psalter Hymnal*. Over the years, during frequently tedious sermons (35-45 minutes long, and hard to follow), I became intimately familiar with every number in that book: with the names of the composers and poets (some of them, like William Shrubsole, humorous to a child); with the often mysterious tune names; with the even more mysterious metrical index; and even with all the liturgical forms and doctrinal standards in the back of the book. I also read the Bible frequently during sermons.

The *Psalter Hymnal* contained (and the newer grey edition even more so contains) a veritable self-education in Reformed hymnody and doctrine – and as a child, I read it all. And reread it. And reread it. (Today, the projecting of liturgies, Bible passages and songs, text only, onto a screen in many congregations preclude the "need" for leafing through a *Psalter Hymnal* or Bible. Unfortunately, that practice prevents the development of such familiarity.)

I also liked Sunday school, which occurred *after* church. Four- and five-year-olds met in the basement while the big kids met in the sanctuary. I loved the singing: gospel and "Sunday school" choruses that we were taught by rote. And when it was your birthday, you got to drop four (or five) pennies into the slot in the base of a plastic lighthouse that lit up with each coin received – the minuscule money going to missions. (My birthday being in September, I looked forward to that all summer before I turned five.)

'Do you know your memory verse?'

But there was one other aspect of Sunday school, from age four through 8th grade, that I've long since recognized as crucial – a critical something that has now been out of favor for some years: there was always a memory verse. Week after week, year after year, we "had to" recite a verse (or sometimes several verses) from Scripture. Those verses were in our Sunday school papers, and our parents were expected to see that we learned them (and they did).

At the same time, I was learning from memory more extended passages of Scripture at Highland Christian School, where I (and my two sisters and two brothers before me) was receiving my education. I have long realized that I received an excellent education at that "conservative" Christian school in that "conservative" CRC enclave. Catechism, incidentally, started in 3rd Grade. It was held *at school*, classes divided into groups according to which church kids went to, led by their respective ministers. And catechism, too, involved, memorization – of simplified *Heidelberg Catechism* answers laid out in compendia outlined according to the Catechism's *Sin, Salvation, Service*.

As part of my elementary education I learned, too, not only how to diagram sentences so that I could write well, but had a teacher or two who insisted that we learn something about the country which is our northern neighbor (a place which seemed so remote to a child in the 1950s that it could have been on Mars). Thus, I could rattle off all the Canadian provinces and their capitals.

But the most enduring legacy of my early education at both church and school was that memorizing of Scripture, of multiple stanzas of hymns with scriptural themes, and of the Catechism. Now, in good times and bad, such verses, stanzas and passages constantly pop into my head – still mostly in the King James Version! (I wouldn't suggest that we English speakers all go back to the King James Version, but we kids who grew up on it did have a distinct advantage when it came time to studying Shakespeare. My English-teacher sister tells me that most of her current Christian high school students, who have all grown up reading the NIV, get stymied when it comes time to dip into Shakespeare. I recall only a few of my high school English classmates finding Shakespeare incomprehensible.)

Outmoded method?

What about that memorizing of Scripture? I don't know if Christian school teachers (and Sunday school teachers) today insist that their students memorize Scripture verses. I suspect most don't. But I hope they do. I hope this practice is not simply a relic of a bygone era, a vestige of a more conservative place and time, seen as part of outmoded teaching and learning styles. I can think of no more important skill to us Christians today in our confused and confusing world than *knowing* Scripture, and having the ability to call up key verses and passages in an instant. And memorizing hymns, (sung) Psalms and Bible songs – *good,* meaning-laden hymns and songs – is the other side of this precious coin.

Having God's Word in your head helps to sink it into your heart. It will frequently come to mind, and will help you rely on and form in yourself the mind of Christ. At all kinds of moments a passage, verse or even just a phrase will surface, seemingly unbidden (no doubt due to the Spirit's work), urging you to stop and think, reminding you whose you are, compelling you to pray, exhorting you to praise. Such "take away" knowledge is crucial to living ever more sanctified and grateful Christian lives – and crucial to our own comfort and joy, in sickness and in health.

It's a cold and windy, slightly grey but still glorious morning in western New York. God is seeing me through my illnesses and remains ever faithful. Psalm 100, which I learned (KJV) while in the third grade at Highland Christian School, comes to mind. A fitting doxology:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness:
come before his presence with singing.
Know ye that the Lord he is God:
it is he who hath made us, and not we ourselves;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,
and into his courts with praise:
be thankful unto him, and bless his name.
For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting;
and his truth endureth to all generations.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mvantil@adelphia.net>.*

Evangelicals ... continued from p. 16

to show this as a less likely scenario.

That those behind the ECI document have been well-intentioned but have entirely misread the IPCC's findings becomes increasingly clear. Murray shows how claim two – that 'The Consequences of Climate Change will be Significant, and will hit the poor the hardest" is meaningless in the light of the lack of clarity and any degree of certainty over claim one. While the ECI paper goes on to talk about "catastrophic" consequences with "millions of the poor" who could die, Murray says the effects of small rises in temperature – which is by no means certain – may have much less effect than previously thought. According to the latest research "the likely effects of melting ice on sea level rise halves the previous estimates."

Claims three and four then move into the purely moral realm. In the light of claims one and two, the ECI asserts (claim three): "Christian moral convictions demand our response to the Climate Problem." Claim four then becomes: "The need to act is urgent."

And the "action" demanded ultimately by the ECI paper? We are all called to: "reduce carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels."

But, according to Murray, this conclusion has no logic and actually presents more of a danger than global warming itself. He points out that warming, assuming it is global, comes about by "exacerbations of existing problems." He introduces a key analysis from the National Centre for Policy Analysis on exactly this point. It finds:

a) "that by 2085, the contribution of warming to the above listed problems is smaller than other factors unrelated to climate change";
b) "the risks could be lowered much more effectively and economically by reducing current and future vulnerability to climate change rather than through its mitigation,"
c) "adaptation would help develop countries cope with major problems now, whereas generations would pass before anything less than draconian mitigation would have any any discernible effect."

As Murray says, "In other words, we can do more to help the poor by combating these problems now than we would by reducing carbon dioxide emissions. There is a terrible opportunity cost to drastic action to reduce climate change [that which the ECI wants] and that cost would likely weigh heavier on the world's poor than the effects of global warming itself." That is, if global warming is a reality at all of course.

Murray's conclusion is biting. "Evangelical leaders need to give more thought to the unintended consequences of their well-intentioned acts. By devoting spiritual and temporal energy to reducing carbon-dioxide emissions, they will probably hurt the poor more than help them. As Matthew 7:15 says, 'Beware of false prophets, which come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.'" Murray concludes, "By adopting a green agenda, the evangelicals may have thrown the poor to those wolves."

The simple truth is, as much as we might wish it, modern science does not have all the answers. Worse, the human element means that it is often loathe to admit it. Consequently, science and the media can all too easily translate science-faith into science-fact to support global scare story. Or, as Tom Bethell observes, "We are strongly inclined to substitute faith for uncertainty." Well-intentioned Christians, acting upon the media zeitgeist, then believe they have to 'do something'. But we so easily forget that faith in action does not necessarily mean swallowing every apocalyptic message and path of salvation. There are far too many willing to sign up to what may well turn out to be a new religion peddling its own 'certainties' as truth.

"In the beginning Climate Change" – unless, of course, it is rained off. I wonder what the climate experts say?

Googling Youth in Troubled Times

A Conference for Those Working with Youth amid the Culture Wars

Prince Conference Center, Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

July 13–15, 2006

Christian families, schools, and churches often feel as if they are becoming culturally irrelevant to today's youth. How can they most effectively nurture faithful young people amid the tensions that divide, discourage, and confuse them?

This conference will draw together those involved in discipling youth to consider how to approach the spiritual growth of contemporary youth. Please visit *www.csionline.org/googlingyouth* for more information.

This conference is sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, Christian Schools International, the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning, and Calvin Workshops in Communication. Grants have also been provided by the Lilly Vocation Program and by the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, which is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

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Classifieds

Anniversaries

1956 March 13 2006

We give praise to God for 50 years of marriage!

GERRIT AND MINA POT (nee Moes)

will celebrate their **50th Anniversary** on March 13, 2006.

As children and grandchildren we celebrate with them:
Harvey & Carol Pot, *St. Anns, ON* – Justin, Matthew, Brendan, Katelyn, Alanna
Grace & Ed Attema, *Minneapolis, MN* – Melodie, Derek, Jeremy
Jim & Grace Pot, *Waterdown, ON* – Jared, Lucas, Eric, Shannon
Bernie & Donna Pot, *Hamilton, ON* – Abigail
Joanne & Pete Hoekstra, *Dunnville, ON* – Nicholas, Mariah, Curtis
Ralph & Sara Pot, *St. Catharines, ON* – Emily, Sophia

Open House will be held on Saturday, March 25 from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.
at the Best Western Cairncroft in Niagara Falls, ON (6400 Lundy's Lane).
Best wishes only please.

Home address: 27 Garden Dr, Smithville ON L0R 2A0

1956 March 11 2006

WILLIAM AND AGNES BENNINK

With praise and thanksgiving
we acknowledge that

The LORD is good and
his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues
to all generations.
(Psalm 100:5)

Congratulations,
Mom and Dad/Oma and Opa,
on your **50th Wedding Anniversary.**
May God continue to keep you
in his loving care.

With love from your family,
Bill & Tricia Dodds, *Ada, MI* – Lauren, Alexandra
Fred & Arlene Bennink, *Ancaster, ON* – Aaron, Kaitlin, Meagan
David & Fran Bennink, *Downington, PA* – PJ, Carlie, Alayna, Billy, Connor, Ethan
John & Sharon Dykhouse, *Grand Rapids, MI* – Karilyn, Courtney, Taylor, Chase

Home address: Suite#215 - 275 Main St E Grimsby ON L3M 5N8

1956 March 2 2006

Brockville, Ontario

Psalm 23

With joy and thanksgiving, we are happy
to announce the **50th Wedding Anniversary**
of our parents and grandparents,

SID AND MARY DE SCHIFFART (nee **Oostlander**)

We are thankful for God's faithfulness
and for your presence in our lives.
An Open House will be held in the summer,
when the family is available to gather
to celebrate and camp together.

With love,
Gary & Trish, *Maitland, ON*
Charley & Helen, *Ottawa, ON*
Clarence, *Wolfville, NS*
Ron & Kim, *Kemptville, ON*
Judy & Eppo, *Jordan Station, ON*
Brian & Sue, *Nanaimo, BC*
Tim & Joanna, *Cherryfield, ME*
And your 22 grandchildren

Mailing address: RR #1
Brockville ON K6V 5T1

Trust in the Lord with all your heart... Proverbs 3:5

With praise and thanksgiving to the LORD for his faithfulness
we announce the **50th Wedding Anniversary**
of our parents and grandparents

GERRIT AND MARY DEKKEMA

on March 17, 2006 D.V.

Dad and Mom, Poppa and Nana
We rejoice with you on this special occasion!
May you continue to know and experience God's blessings
in your life together.

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Joanne Dekkema – Garrett, Daniel
Wendy & Harold Lenters – Mary-Beth, Harrison, Mackenzie
Kim & Andrew Beunk – Colleen, Andrea, Jake

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Met vriendelijke groeten

Obituary

Munein, Fryslan
February 2, 1918

Bowmanville, Ontario
January 17, 2006

JESSICA (Jiskje) REKKER (nee **vander Beek**)

In the presence of her family, she went home to be with her Lord,
at Lakeridge Health, Bowmanville.

Beloved wife for 63 years of Jelle J. Rekker
Dear Mother of: Richard & Lucy Rekker
John & Pat Rekker
Joe & Diane Rekker
Sylvia & Dirk Bouma
Harry & Nellie Rekker
Julia & Frank Hoftyzer
Loving Grandmother of 20 and Great-grandmother of 19.

Mom will be sadly missed by all her family and many friends, but
we are encouraged by her request that we consider Romans 8:28....
And we know that all things work together for good to those who love
God, to those who are the called according to his purpose."

Correspondence may be sent to: Jelle Rekker, 2153 Maple Grove Rd, Bowmanville ON L1C 3K7

Student Financial Aid

The student fund committee of the **Classis Quinte** of the Christian Reformed Church provides **financial help to students preparing for full time ministry** in the Christian Reformed Church. Applicants may find the link to the application form at http//:www.cobourggrace.org. Applications may be mailed, emailed or faxed to the chair of the committee, Jack VanderVeer, by March 31, 2006.

Job Opportunities

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Since 1965 the Ministry to Seafarers of the Christian Reformed Church in North America has served the seafarers who come to Montreal.

Starting July 2006 we need a full-time, male, staff person with fluency in English and French. Skill in other languages will be an asset. Operating out of Mariner's House in the old port, this staffer will assist Chaplain Ms Michelle dePooter with visiting ships, and will devote half-time to developing a base for the ministry in the evangelical churches of greater Montreal. Appropriate education and skills are required. The capacity to be ordained as a ministry associate in the CRCNA will be an asset. A detailed job description is available. Please submit resume, academic qualifications, a thorough statement of faith, and salary expectations to our administrator,

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min2seaf@colba.net
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Send inquiries or resumes to Bill Vantriet, Search Committee Chair, at

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Centennial Christian School is located in the beautiful Pacific Northwest area of British Columbia. Centennial Christian School is an inter-denominational school with a teaching staff of 19 and a support staff of 10, and presently offers Christian education to 200 students in Kindergarten – Grade 12. Please contact the principal or vice principal for further details and send letter of application, resume and other information to:

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Terrace, B. C. V8G 2V6
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Secondary School Maternity Leave Position

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL has a maternity leave position available beginning May 1st, 2006 and continuing until April 30, 2007, with the possibility of extending until June 30, 2007.

The position is **Learning Assistance Coordinator** for grades 8-12.

The position involves 50% classroom teaching and 50% coordinating of the Secondary L.A. Program. Qualifications include: BCCT certification, experience teaching students with learning disabilities at the secondary school level; ability to liaise with parents, students, teachers, and community resource people; experience in applying for adjudication for provincial exams; experience reading and utilizing psychological-educational assessments; experience in developing and implementing student IEPs.

Qualified applicants should send a cover letter, resume, at least two letters of reference and their statement of faith to:

David O' Dell, Secondary Principal
Pacific Christian Secondary School
654 Agnes Street
Victoria BC V8Z 2E6
Phone: (250) 479-4532
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Application deadline: Friday, March 31, 2006
www.unitychristianhigh.ca

See page 21 for more job opportunities...
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Job Opportunities/ Advertising

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August 2006

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August, 2007

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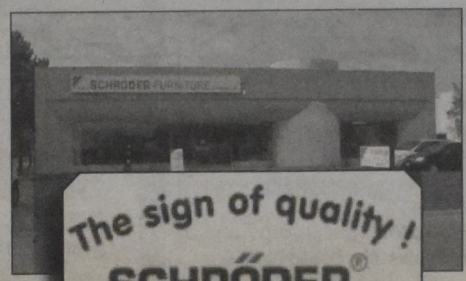

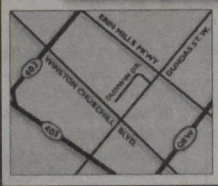

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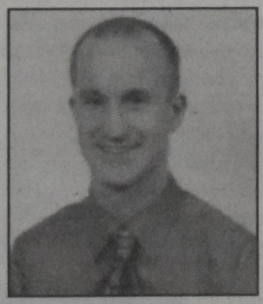

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 10, 11 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presents "Gasten in Eigen Huis" at Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock**. See ad this issue for more details.

Mar 24 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presents "Gasten in Eigen Huis" 8 p.m. at Heritage Christian School, **Jordan**. See ad this issue for more details.

Apr 7 The **Liberation Choir** in Concert with the students of Holland Marsh District Christian School on Friday at 7.30 p.m. Springdale Christian Reformed Church,1351 River Road, **Bradford,** Ont. For tickets please call 905 775 3701

Apr 7-9 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend at the Travel Lodge **Kingston.** For more information or to register call: Jamie and Wilma Kulyk 905-987-4272 **or** E-mail james.kuyk@sympatico.ca

Apr 8 The **Liberation Choir** and Living Rock Ministries team up for a Benefit Concert on Saturday 7.30 p.m. Central Presbyterian Church, 150 Charlton Ave (corner of Caroline and Charlton) **Hamilton** Ont. Tickets: $15.00 ea. For tickets please call 905 528 7625. www.livingrock.ca

May 6, 7 Grace CRC, **Coburg**, 50th anniversary. All invited to join in celebrations. Biletting available. Call 905-372-3642 or email: grace.church@bellnet.ca. Website: www.cobourggrace.org

May 6 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Saturday evening at 7:30 p.m. St. Paul's Congregational Church, 450 Park Ave. **Chatham** Tickets $10.00. Advance: 351-7151 or at the door. Information (519) 637-4357.

May 7 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, **St. Thomas**. Freewill offering for the Canadian Bible Society. Information: (519) 637-4357.

May 12,13 Jarvis District Christian School, 50th anniversary. On Friday evening – dinner and an evening program. Tickets available from February 15 to March 31, 2006. Seating is limited. Payment of $50.00 per ticket must accompany order. Various activities are planned for Saturday concluding with a service of Thanksgiving at the neighbouring CRC at 7:00 p.m. For more information visit www.jdcs.ca and to purchase tickets contact Marcia Cota (519)587-3111.

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Saturday April 8 @ 7.30 p.m. with Living Rock Ministries Central Presbyterian Church, 150 Charlton Ave (corner of Caroline and Charlton) **Hamilton** Ontario. Tickets: $15.00 ea. For tickets please call 905 528 7625.

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News

Venezuela's unrealized revolution

Many of President Hugo Chávez's supporters wonder when his changes will improve their lives.

Juan Francisco Rivas stands outside his outhouse in the hillside slum of Petare near Caracas, Venezuela

Vinod Sreeharsha

CARACAS – Seven years after Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez first took office, an event commemorated in early February, Juan Francisco Rivas is still waiting for the "revolution."

His 24-square-meter makeshift house, currently inhabited by nine people, sits at a 45-degree angle atop one of the city's worst hillside slums, Petare. His roof is a single metal sheet. There is no hot water.

Mr. Rivas voted for Mr. Chávez in 1998 but today, while showing his often-flooded living room, says, "Look at this place and tell me honestly that Chávez is for the poor."

During the 1990s, Rivas worked as a carpenter and even had social security. Today he is grateful to get three days of work per week, all in the underground economy.

Meanwhile, Chávez has spent much of this month warning of a possible US invasion, preparing a citizen army, and lambasting President Bush. His rhetoric has made him a darling of leftists worldwide. Yet, ordinary Venezuelans like Mr. Rivas are growing increasingly frustrated with the country's inadequate housing, under-resourced public hospitals, and damaged roads.

Chávez, who said Sunday he may seek to lift presidential term limits to allow him to run for a third term in 2013, maintains a high domestic approval rating and has no viable challenger in the presidential election scheduled for Dec. 3. But polls show his support slipping slightly in recent months and even some of his staunchest supporters – known as Chavistas – are wondering when they will start seeing more improvements in their daily lives.

"[Chávez] is transferring responsibility for Venezuela's problems to Bush," says Luis Petrosini, an economics professor at the Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, who has voted for Chávez twice.

In November, cardiologist Juan Carlos De Gouveia resigned from Miguel Perez Carreño hospital, one of Venezuela's largest public hospitals. Dr. De Gouveia was raised in a poor Caracas neighborhood and spent decades serving poor Venezuelans. In his resignation letter, he described interminable battles with hospital administrators to obtain basic supplies such as sterilization equipment.

At another Caracas hospital four patients died in one night last August after its oxygen supplies ran out. This month the Venezuelan Medical Society suspended all elective procedures there, saying conditions had still not improved.

Meanwhile, the government here announced recently that it will help over 50 African countries combat malaria, even though the number of malaria cases in Venezuela in 2004 was the second highest since 1937 and twice that of when Chávez took office.

Marcial Bastitas, who lives in a poor section of Caracas, is also frustrated. Surrounded by six Chavista friends, he says that "we should take care of our problems first." They nod in agreement.

Venezuela also faces a public housing shortage. According to figures from the Venezuela Chamber of Housing, less than 30,000 homes were built in 2005 out of the 120,000 promised by Chávez.

Many of Venezuela's roads are also deteriorating. Last month the highway connecting the capital Caracas with its international airport and second largest port was closed indefinitely due to a collapsing bridge. The closure of this major artery impacts 35 percent of the country's commerce according to Veneconomia, a leading business research publication.

Truck driver Gerardo Crespo says his income has been cut in half due to the reduced number of cargo hauls he can make. He voted for Chávez in 1998 but now asks, "How many years has this government had?"

Chávez insists that he is being made out to be a scapegoat for the infrastructure problems. Last month he called discussion of the highway closure "a media strategy against me." Government officials say it has been more important to allocate funds to antipoverty programs.

To be sure, Venezuelan governments have known about the collapsing bridge for 20 years but have done little. And public hospitals have long been neglected in Venezuela. "They have never been a priority," says Dr. Asia Villegas, Caracas's top health official and a Chávez-appointee.

Dr. Villegas also emphasizes that the Chávez government's priority has been to invest in new social programs for those long-ignored by past governments. In the Barrio Adentro program, for example, Chávez has imported 20,000 Cuban physicians to work in Venezuela's slums. In 2005 alone, the government spent $651 million on this according to Veneconomia.

The Cuban-run clinics are limited to basic practice – prescribing medicine and performing routine checkups. And despite their presence in the barrios, the patient volume at Perez Carreño's Emergency Room has increased in recent years.

Chávez, responding to pressure, announced late last year a $2.5 billion effort to revamp the country's hospitals while integrating them into Barrio Adentro. But the government refuses to say what percent is earmarked for Venezuelan hospitals and how much for the Cuban-run clinics.

The working-class residents of the barrio Catia may be forgiven if they are skeptical of this new initiative. A public hospital was closed here over two years ago in order to be converted into a Barrio Adentro clinic that has yet to open.

Vinod Sreeharsha is a correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor

News briefs

Daughters make left-wingers

Researchers at two different universities have aired a study with far-reaching implications, although neither the researchers nor journalists have realized the importance of the findings. They discovered that parents with female children – daughters – tend to vote left. Those with sons, tend to vote right.

"It has been a longstanding idea in western society that parents influence the behavior and psychology of their offspring," said U of Warwick economics professor Andrew Oswald. "This work reverses that habit of thinking. It suggests that children shape their parents."

It has other implications that are political. We have published reports in the past that in the two most populous countries in the world – China and India – female births are falling far behind male births. So these studies, if my own faultless logic serves me well, augur a definite shift to the right in global politics.

Even after factoring out other characteristics, such as parents' income, education and age, the researchers found that having a daughter was likely to turn political allegiance to the left. And the researchers looked at German as well as British statistics.

But I wonder whether that isn't a culture-specific trend. Would fathers of many daughters in the US, for example, be more prone to join those lefties who trust in human nature or those law-and-order types dedicated to keeping lust in check?

The brains of mice and men

Neuroscientists have discovered that all that male swagger and aggression depends on female hormones – in mice anyway. Besides revealing that it is the lack of estrogen that makes the brains of female mice feminine, the study indicated that it is the presence of the hormone that makes male mice behave as males.

I was just on the point of concluding that this might just undermine those optimistic claims made by certain feminists that more women in politics will make for a more peaceful world, when at the conclusion of the article I was informed that it doesn't work that way in the case of primates, which is the august company to which we highly evolved creatures belong.

While mouse civilization depends on female hormones for initiative and ambition, we more highly evolved types rely on male hormones. Too much of a good thing, however, leads to shootings, some accidental and some not.

Scientists in California injected human brain cells into the brains of mice. No, it wasn't to create a character who could play the role of Mickey Mouse in the latest Disney production.

The experiment and others like it have raised ethical questions about crossing certain boundaries. I have more serious concerns. Mice have been breaking into my library recently. So far they've only been nibbling on cheap paperback novels. But what happens when they reach Marx and Nietzsche and finally get into all that stuff about oppressed minorities?

Not to worry, said the scientists, "You will never ever have a little human trapped inside a mouse or monkey's body."

Whew, what a relief! Even without human brain cells those little rodents have been outsmarting me. But a little cheese eventually overcomes even the smartest mouse. I've heard that said of Dutchmen too: a little piece of Gouda now and then, and he's immune from the temptations of German or French philosophy.